Staging Intersectionality: Power and Performance in American Cultural Texts, 1855-2019

Alexandra Reznik

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STAGING INTERSECTIONALITY:
POWER AND PERFORMANCE IN AMERICAN CULTURAL TEXTS, 1855-2019

A Dissertation
Presented to the McAnulty College of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

As partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Alexandra B. Reznik

August 2019
STAGING INTERSECTIONALITY:
POWER AND PERFORMANCE IN AMERICAN CULTURAL TEXTS, 1855-2019

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ABSTRACT

STAGING INTERSECTIONALITY:
POWER AND PERFORMANCE IN AMERICAN CULTURAL TEXTS, 1855- 2019

By
Alexandra B. Reznik
August 2019

Dissertation supervised by Professor Kathy Glass

This study explores a diverse array of cultural texts, from literary representations to live performances, from the antebellum period to the contemporary moment, that highlight African-American women singer-celebrities navigating entertainment industries in the United States. Focusing on significant figures from the nineteenth century to the present including Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (the first prominently known Black woman singer in the antebellum period), Pauline Hopkins (the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelist and soprano), Sissieretta Jones (a twentieth-century soprano singer), and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter (a contemporary singer-celebrity, songwriter, and producer), this study re-imagines the archive of Black singer-celebrities by centering Black women’s performances and voices to illuminate the diverse, nuanced representations of resistance and empowerment that Black women and singers enact, thus charting a new, nuanced historical trajectory of the development of Black women
celebrities in American culture. I argue their multifaceted representations in various archives, from historical biographies and legal documents to social media and streaming services, provide ways of understanding the complex relationships between body and voice, performance, and social justice.

Building on the research of Uri McMillan, Daphne Brooks, Carla L. Peterson, and Nell Irvin Painter, who analyze African-American women’s creative resistance to systems of white supremacy and sexism, this project extends ongoing scholarly conversations in literary, musicological, and historical studies to develop a praxis of staging intersectionality: intentionally using various materials including song lyrics, photographs, letters, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction by and about African-American women singer-celebrities, to enrich and correct historical and popular cultural representations, and imagine new ways to approach American and celebrity studies.
DEDICATION

For the passionate learners who’ve been and will be told “no.”
Do it anyway. Manifest your “yes” into existence.
Infinite gratitude to my dissertation director and mentor Dr. Kathy Glass. Throughout graduate school, you’ve shared and encouraged me to pursue so many opportunities including writing for the *ESQ: Journal of the American Renaissance* “Year in Conferences” feature and for *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, joining the Racial Equality Social Justice Seminar, and confidently pursuing the job market. Yours and Brent’s generosity in running practice interviews with me (even on Langston’s birthday!) is a testament to your dedication and brilliance. Thank you for always reminding me to enjoy the process and be myself.

Dr. Faith Barrett, thank you for introducing me to the worlds of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writers Group, and Women and Gender Studies coordination. Dr. Laura Engel, thank you for throughout my time at Duquesne encouraging me to unapologetically embrace my passion for pop culture and celebrity studies. Dr. Greg Barnhisel, thank you for putting on your “journal-editor and book-editor hat,” for believing in me, and for challenging me. Dr. Emad Mirmotahari, thank you for your co-teaching experience, and for treating me as a colleague from day one and throughout my time at Duquesne. Linda Kinnahan and Dr. Tom Kinnahan, I’ve enjoyed the amazing opportunities and insights you’ve shared with me. Dr. Danielle St. Hilaire and Dr. Sarah Breckenridge-Wright, thank you for your guidance and encouragement in my publishing efforts. Huge thanks to the incomparable Chatham community including Dr. Anissa Wardi, Dr. William Lenz, Dr. Lynne Bruckner, and Dr. Prajna Parasher who made my transition into graduate school so seamless, and who are now making my transition into the professorship so empowering.

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Many thanks to my family, specifically my parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters for their support. Thank you for the bahn mi and venting dates, Fral.

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Introduction

*It is more likely for Black women as members of an oppressed group to have critical insights into the condition of our own oppression than it is for those who live outside those structures.*

—Patricia Hill Collins

“Freedom” and Staging Intersectionality

In “Hope,” the penultimate chapter of her 2016 visual album *Lemonade*, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter stands before an audience of Black women on a stage in the middle of a plantation field. She proclaims:

FREEDOM
FREEDOM
I CAN’T MOVE
FREEDOM CUT ME LOOSE
FREEDOM
FREEDOM
WHERE ARE YOU?
CAUSE I NEED FREEDOM TOO
I BREAK CHAINS ALL BY MYSELF
WON’T LET MY FREEDOM ROT IN HELL
I’MA KEEP RUNNING CAUSE A WINNER DON’T QUIT ON THEMSELVES

The tension between “cut me loose” and “I break chains all by myself” emphasizes both individualism as well as interdependence. The lyrics “I can’t move” and “I’m a keep running” simultaneously represent the experience of oppressive stillness and liberating movement; they convey the hopeful and mournful strains, and the physical and mental realities African-Americans communicated through spirituals. Knowles-Carter performs “Freedom” while simultaneously aspiring towards it as an artist. More specifically, as a Black woman singer-

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celebrity, Knowles-Carter performs and imagines “Freedom” along the axes of race, class, and gender in a system structured by racism, sexism, and classism. In short, “Freedom!” provides a way to think about Black female celebrity.

In analyzing Black women’s experiences and cultural formations, this project draws on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s term “intersectionality,” which highlights institutional failures to focus on and legitimize Black women’s experiences. This project develops an analytical lens that actively searches for, identifies, and situates marginalized African-American women singer-celebrities’ voices within entertainment and publishing industries from the nineteenth century to the present. If, as Crenshaw avers, “race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences,” then how do we responsibly work with texts created within entertainment and publishing industries that historically render Black women’s voices and experiences silent and/or invisible? How do we comprehend Black women celebrities’ voices through the layers of others who represented and represent them? How can archival materials help us understand in part how Knowles-Carter and earlier Black women celebrities navigated the performance industry? As present literary scholars examining the past, what can focusing on Black women’s performances teach us about resisting oppression from within the entertainment industry? What can a cultural text suggest about Black women celebrities’ performances of “Freedom” within sexist and racist spaces? Approaching texts that represent Black women

3 In Kimberlé Crenshaw’s article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," the term "intersectionality" highlights institutional failures in focusing on and legitimizing experiences of marginalized identities in legal discourse. She draws a direct connection between legal discourse’s failure and "contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses" that fail to "consider intersectional identities such as women of color" (Stanford Law Review, vol. 43, no. 6, July 1991, p. 1242).

singer-celebrities with these questions in mind, I argue, draws needed attention to the ways in which Black women empower themselves within entertainment industries that render their experiences of oppression invisible and silent. If we attend to cultural texts with an intersectional lens, doing the work of keeping Black women as the focal point even when their experiences become silenced and invisible within entertainment and publishing industries, we can begin to answer these pressing questions.

This project is specifically situated within institutions including entertainment and publishing industries that historically render Black women invisible, or visible within conditions that uphold white supremacist, sexist, and classist ideals. In other words, this project explores how Knowles-Carter’s assertion of “Freedom” provides a way to think about Black female celebrity more broadly. While this project argues that Black women singers “stage intersectionality” by affirming their humanity in resistance to the white supremacist tool of minstrelsy, this project also sets forth a praxis of “staging intersectionality”: intentionally using a variety of materials including poetry, fiction, non-fiction, song lyrics, photographs, and letters by and about African-American women singer-celebrities to enrich and correct historical and popular cultural representations. In doing so, I explore the interplay of oppressive and liberating qualities that these cultural texts enact in dynamically shaping and evolving representations of Black female celebrities.

Focusing on significant figures such as Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (the first prominently known Black woman singer in the antebellum period), Pauline Hopkins (a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelist and soprano), Dianthe Lusk (a fictional character in Hopkins’s 1903 serialized novel Of One Blood), soprano Sissieretta Jones and stage hand Eva Shoe (as represented in Tyehimba Jess’s contemporary poetry), and ending with contemporary singer-
celebrity Beyoncé Knowles-Carter (in her own performances and as represented in Morgan Parker’s contemporary poetry), I re-imagine the archive of Black singer-celebrities by foregrounding Black women’s performances and voices to illuminate the diverse, nuanced representations of resistance and empowerment that Black women and singers enact, thus charting a new, nuanced historical trajectory of the development of Black women celebrities in American culture.

Complicating Performance and Resistance

My project builds upon the work of Daphne Brooks, Carla Peterson, Nell Irvin Painter, and Richard J. Douglass-Chin who analyze African-American women’s creative resistance to white supremacy and sexism, and theorize how Black women navigate systems of power occur across genre and time. Specifically, these scholars engage with the textual representations of “black female preacher, feminist, and abolitionist” Sojourner Truth, to understand Black women’s performance contexts and creation of subjectivity on the stage.

Douglass-Chin pinpoints Truth’s shaping of subjectivity by creating “a self out of the very discourses of contradiction that threaten to simultaneously embody and disembody her.” In both drawing upon and resisting these discourses in her speeches, Truth “demystifies the “naturalness” of such discourses, playing, in her own self-(per)formance, upon that contradictory black female self constructed by white Americans; she becomes elusive, “unnatural,” tricksterlike.” The racist discourses Truth operated within sought to justify the enslavement of Black people in the United States during the antebellum period; however, through Truth

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6 Douglass-Chin, p. 59-60.
7 Douglass-Chin, p. 60.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

circulates daguerreotypes of herself and thus “resists objectification and erasure through the selling not of her body nude and shackled, but of representations of that body demurely dressed and located at the hearthside.”\(^8\) She resists the opposite image of what abolitionists relied upon when they showcased the scarred, silent body of a slave upon a stage by constructing a clothed body which stares into the face of the viewer. Yet, in another moment during a speech which she describes in her *Narrative*, Truth strategically embraces and works within the limitations of the “mammy” caricature by enacting “a deliberate public ‘exhibition’ of her own body”\(^9\) when a heckler expresses doubt that she is a woman. She revealed her breast to the audience, explaining that she “had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring.”\(^10\) She communicates her lived experience as a slave through her voice and her body; simultaneously, she takes up the nurturing, self-giving mammy caricature, and takes discursive control back from a heckler who wished to silence her message.

While Douglass-Chin’s project examines Sojourner Truth’s nineteenth-century performances, his critical lens can be modified to illuminate similar resistance strategies by Black women in *Staging Intersectionality*. Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the first prominent Black woman singer-celebrity in the antebellum period, similarly resisted and reinforced racial stereotypes. She dressed in modest gowns that covered her body, for example, but also highlighted her “embonpoint,” as many of the famous women singers did, by wearing a tightly tucked waistline and very low-cut collar. She wore dresses that were partly modest on the bottom with a flowing skirt, partly immodest on top with a low-cut collar, fulfilling and challenging the

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\(^8\) Douglass-Chin, p. 65.  
\(^9\) Douglass-Chin, p. 83.  
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

stereotypes of the de-sexualized “mammy” figure while also presenting her body sexually. She piqued audience curiosity by dressing similarly to her white counterparts, and then arrived on the stage to sing not only concert music, but also “The Vision of a Negro Slave,” a song that represented the dehumanizing consequences of slavery, to predominantly white audiences.

Similar tensions emerge in Pauline Hopkins’s 1903 novel *Of One Blood*, represents the Fisk University Singers, the popular troupe of African-Americans travelling the world to raise money for their school, counter disparaging minstrel stereotypes, and showcase Black talent. By Dianthe Lusk, the fictional Black female vocalist, wearing a modest dress, she presents herself as a modest woman to affirm her humanity in resistance to the “tragic mulatta” or oversexed Jezebel stereotype as she sings the spiritual “Go Down Moses” which, in the nineteenth century, communicated resistance to slavery, and, Dianthe’s context at the beginning of the twentieth century, communicates resistance to systemic violence upheld by racist laws. Sissieretta Jones, a twentieth-century African-American prima donna, began her shows with minstrel caricatures and songs and yet finished her shows by wearing royal, European-style dresses to perform her operatic arias. Her dress and song choices comprise performances that resist a racist entertainment industry that only hired white women singers for concert halls and relegated Black performers to minstrel shows. In comparison to the Black women singers I analyze, who use modesty and sexuality as resistance strategies to challenge stereotypes and affirm subjectivity, in the late twentieth century, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter embraces the sexualized stereotypes of Black women by wearing leg and chest-baring leotards while proclaiming women’s empowerment; in the twenty-first century, in a modest white dress, she makes a strong, direct political statement by celebrating of Black talent and calling for an end to police brutality in her visual album *Lemonade.*
The women who take the stage of this study, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, Pauline Hopkins, Sissieretta Jones, and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, unlike Truth, did not explicitly argue for the abolition of slavery and call for workers’ rights. Within entertainment industries that, as Crenshaw reminds us, sought to make their raced, gendered, and classed experiences silent and invisible, embracing their racial identity was necessary for their rise to fame and access to more audiences and performance opportunities. However, like Truth, they are all inheritors of the blackface minstrelsy tradition and their performances can be read as both acquiescent and resistant to it. In her analysis of Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*, literary critic Brooks articulates the significance of history, identity, embodiment, and literature to understand Black women singers and celebrities: “By using performance tactics to signify on the social, cultural, and ideological machinery that circumscribes African Americans, they [historical figures] intervene in the spectacular and systemic representational abjection of black peoples” (283). The “performance tactics” that Brooks identifies are strategies that entail drawing upon, acquiescing to, and resisting racialized and gendered stereotypes that justifies the not only the “systemic representation abjection of black peoples,” but also the literal abjection that manifests in rendering experience silent and invisible. Specifically in the context of this project, I analyze the strategies that the various Black women singers in this study perform—from Greenfield singing lyrics that communicate abolitionist values, to Hopkins representing Dianthe’s drastic shift from

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11 Here, I draw upon Brooks’s methodology of reading nineteenth-century actress Adah Isaacs Menken with Sojourner Truth to complicate Black women singer-celebrities who always already are Black women on the stage, but not as vocal about their racial identities as Truth was: “Yet in spite of her ambivalent relationship to race, Menken is in fact a critical figure to read alongside a woman like Truth. An alternative context for examining Menken’s self-representational practices enables us, for instance, to draw parallels between the cultural work of (white) women in theatre and the urgent and innovative performance strategies of black women living within slavery’s specter” (156).
performing on the stage to the oppression that she experiences in the domestic sphere, to Jones programming minstrel performances that lead to performing concert music for larger audiences, to Knowles-Carter singing “Freedom” on a southern plantation to highlight resistance against systemic, violent oppression of Black citizens that persists today—exemplify the potential for “performance tactics” that can represent Black women’s experiences that “social, cultural, and ideological machinery,” render invisible and/or mute. Similarly, this project explores Black women singer-celebrities’ performances which complicate their subjectivities in the face of caricatures blackface minstrelsy perpetuated.

On the other hand, this project focuses on performances that simultaneously highlight the complex reality of Black women singer-celebrities who assert their subjectivity by resisting dehumanizing stereotypes as well as showcasing talent. In her lecture “Not About Protest,” literary scholar Koritha Mitchell reminds us to focus on the excellence and success of Black artistry, rather than focusing on an artist’s resistance to oppression as a driving impetus of their artistry:

> Historians and literary critics have been getting it wrong. Teachers and general readers have been getting it wrong. We’ve all been viewing African-American culture through the lens of protest. We think in terms of oppression and resistance as in lynching and anti-lynching campaigns, or segregation and anti-segregation activism. If we encounter black literature or art that does not respond to domination, we treat it as evidence that African-Americans affirm themselves by creating spaces of refuge and escape. In other words, we operate as if African-Americans either ignore the injustices that they face or completely protest. This is a mistake because affirming oneself and facing violence often go together.¹²

Bringing together Brooks’s and Mitchell’s ideas about performance, resistance, and protest allows us to avoid the cause and effect relationship between blackface minstrelsy and artistic

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skill and choice, and instead to focus on the specificities of how each Black women singer-celebrity enacts subjectivity through her performances. “Resisting” and “protesting” as aspects of Black women’s performance has the potential to re-inscribe binaries, obscure understanding of talent, and judge whether Black women are “right” or “wrong” in terms of their choices on the stage. Instead, we can think about how women assert agency—even in small ways—to resist negative ascription and protest stereotypical ideas about Black womanhood. We can use “protesting” and “resisting” while at the same time avoiding binary thinking. There are different ways to resist and protest as each of these women “stages intersectionality” in her own context.

_Theoretical Framework for Staging Intersectionality_

My project builds upon and across literary, musicological, and historical scholarship by applying an intersectional framework that first searches for and identifies marginalized voices in historical and fictional texts; I then analyze those representations by situating Black women’s voices within “domains of power, namely structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal” (Collins and Bilge, 27). Specifically, I examine Black women’s voices within the entertainment industry’s “domains of power” that manifest as structural (the racist, sexist, and classist entertainment industry’s implicit and explicit hegemonic discourses); disciplinary (Black women’s

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13 Sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge’s intersectional methodology involves understanding interlocking systems of oppression such as racism and sexism through “domains of power, namely structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal” (Intersectionality (Key Concepts). Polity, 2016, p. 27).

14 While Richard J. Douglass-Chin theorizes “(per)formance” of nineteenth-century Black women preachers specifically, we can use this term to understand how Greenfield, as a Black woman on stage in a different capacity during the nineteenth century, constructed Black womanhood. Douglass-Chin’s definition of “(per)formance,” meaning a “profound self-fashioning that demystifies and challenges the ‘performance’ of black womanhood prescribed and/or described as ‘natural’ by hegemonic discourses (11), usefully describes the domains of power Black women singer-celebrities perform within (Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists. U of Missouri Press, 2001).
women performers’ experiences as impacted by the hegemonic discourses); cultural (the white-supremacist tradition of blackface minstrelsy which shaped hegemonic discourses, specifically audiences’ stereotypical perceptions of Black performers); and interpersonal (the interactions between the performer and other individuals).

The structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal domains of power are interweaving. The structural and cultural domains of power interact, for example, when white reviewers both celebrated Black women singers’ talent and denied their individuality by renaming them in relation to their white counterparts. Greenfield’s stage name was “the Black Swan,” which strongly contrasted with white vocalist Jenny Lind’s nickname, the “Swedish Nightingale.” The structural and interpersonal domains of power interact to create a tradition of published reviews and audience members identifying African-American women performers in relation to their white counterparts. This nineteenth-century practice endures well into the twentieth century with Sissieretta Jones, for example. Published reviews and audience members prominently identified her as “The Black Patti” in comparison to the opera singer Adelina Patti; Jones used “The Black Patti” name to market her own enormously successful show “Black Patti’s Troubadours.” While Tyehimba Jess’s representation of Jones in the poem “My Name is Sissieretta Jones” laments that “The Black Patti” name was a product of the entertainment

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15 The most-cited nineteenth-century text on Greenfield, William S. Young’s biography *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad; or, A Biographical Sketch of Miss Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, The American Vocalist* (1855), explains that after white patrons discovered Greenfield on a steamship “while crossing Lake Seneca, en route to Buffalo,” the Buffalo Musical Association first proclaimed “Give the ‘Black Swan,’ said they, the cultivation and experience of the fair Swede, or Md’lle Parodi, and she will rank favourably (sic) with those popular singers, who have carried the nation into captivity by their rare musical abilities” (5). This “fair Swede” the Buffalo Musical Association alludes to is performer Jenny Lind (1820-1887).
industry wanting to “bleed all the sass out [my] name,”16 musical historian Maureen D. Lee explains that Jones once told a reporter “It rather annoys me…I am afraid people will think I consider myself the equal of Patti herself. I assure you I don’t think so, but I have a voice and I am striving to win the favor of the public by honest merit and hard work.”17 Close-reading these moments showcases the oppression of white audiences renaming Black bodies, which, although complimentary, denies Black women individuality, as well as Black women acquiescing to and critiquing these names to foster success as performers showcases the complex power dynamics they navigated and continue to navigate.

This project brings celebrity studies together with Collins’s and Bilge’s sociological methodology by analyzing singers’ voices as well as their textual representations. In the context of celebrity studies, Leo Braudy identifies two points of concentration for effective scholarship: performers as well as the “extra-textual aspect of performance” which Braudy defines as

all the “surround” of the performer that sometimes is in vital response to whatever text is present but just as often is in tension with it, contradicts it, or ignores it. In other words, surround is everything else that the audience pays attention to, in addition to the somewhat circumscribed and formalized performance.18

Understanding the “performer” is complicated when, as Crenshaw reminds us, we reflect on Black women within systems of power, including the entertainment industry. Only the “extra-textual aspect of performance,” specifically the ephemeral archival presences of Black women’s performances such as published critical reviewers by white writers, inform our understanding of each of them as a performer; yet, we can expand the “extra-textual aspect of performance” to

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18 Braudy, Leo. “Knowing the Performer from the Performance: Fame, Celebrity, and Literary Studies.” *PMLA*, vol. 126, no. 4, October 2011, p. 1073.
include fictional representations, poetry, and photographs to center the performers’ self-fashioning strategies to avoid perpetuating information we can glean from published reviews. In contrast to Greenfield, Hopkins, and Jones, Knowles-Carter’s performances and perspectives on her experiences within the entertainment industry are readily accessible; however, I argue that close-reading representations of Greenfield, Lusk via Hopkins, and Jones provides ways of understanding Knowles-Carter’s self-presentation. While we have much more access to Knowles-Carter’s performances and perspectives, reflecting on what she strategically curates for her audiences illuminates how to understand her artistry as both artistically and politically strategic. Developing a praxis of what I call “staging intersectionality,” my project intentionally close-reads Black women singers’ voices in a variety of “extra-textual aspects of performance” including song lyrics, photographs, and letters by and about African-American women singer-celebrities, as well as poetry, speculative fiction, and non-fiction that represents the tension of “Freedom” as both a resistant performance and aspiration for singers themselves, as well as marginalized audiences.19

Published reviews throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continued to perpetuate the oppressive and complimentary entertainment industry standard of comparing Greenfield to her white counterparts. Significantly, Hopkins’s 1901 “Famous Women” feature in The Colored American Magazine on “Phenomenal Vocalists” documents an interpersonal domain of power (the interactions between the performer and other individuals) that had remained invisible in published works on Greenfield: African-American women writing about

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19 I avoid specifying beyond marginalized audiences here because the Black women singers’ performances I analyze showcase both their pro-Black and feminist resistance. For example, Hopkins’s representation of Dianthe as being oppressed within the institution of marriage brings together an experience of racism and sexism. Knowles-Carter’s song “Who Run the World? GIRLS” seeks to counter sexism across racial identities.
African-American women performers. As Greenfield was beginning to slip away in public consciousness at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, Hopkins counters the practice of comparing Black women singers to their white counterparts by situating Greenfield among other Black women singers including Madame Annie Pauline Pindell, Emma Louise Hyers, Anna Madah, and Madame Marie Selika.20 Hopkins resists the entertainment industry’s structural and cultural domains of power that compared Pindell to her white counterpart Alboni, by situating Greenfield and Pindell, two Black women singers, together, in comparison: “The compass of this singer’s voice [Pindell’s] was the same as the ‘Black Swan’s,’ embracing twenty-seven notes, from G in bass clef to E in treble clef. Musical critics compared her to Madame Alboni” (118). In changing the entertainment industry’s standard of elevating white women singers above Black women singers, Hopkins depicts Greenfield as a standard to measure the other singers by, which challenges the cultural domain of power that traditionally compares Black women singers to their white counterparts.

Minstrelsy as an Interweaving Domain of Power

Blackface minstrelsy was a powerful “social, cultural, and ideological machinery” that upheld segregationist legislation and justified white violence against African-Americans. My project will explore how Black female singers re-appropriated and revised these racist and sexist

20 The most recent bibliographic record on Greenfield which appears in The Pen is Ours: A Listing of Writings by and about African-American Women before 1910 with Secondary Bibliography to the Present (1991) shows that African-American reporter, medical professional, and writer Monroe Alpheus Majors’s Noted Negro Women, Their Triumphs and Activities (1893) and African-American writer Lawson Scruggs’s Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character (1893) were the last two works published on Greenfield within compiled historical bibliographies on successful African-American women in the nineteenth century. Their bibliography reflects that nothing else was published on Greenfield again until African-American literary scholar Benjamin Griffith Brawley’s historical bibliographies compilation The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States in 1918. The bibliography, although published in 1991, does not include Hopkins’s 1901 feature on Greenfield.
stereotypes to shape their own subjectivity and celebrity. Blackface minstrelsy’s complex origin and history reveal the interplay between oppression, resistance, and freedom.\textsuperscript{21} Specifically, in Marlon Riggs’s 1987 film \textit{Ethnic Notions}, Esther Rolle explains that “In the late 1820s, T.D. Rice brought a new sensation to American theatre. He was known as an Ethiopian Delineator, a white comedian who performed in blackface. The name of his routine would later become the symbol of segregation in the south.”\textsuperscript{22} This demeaning, racist performance shaped, and arguably continue to shape, Black artists’ performances strategies whether acquiescing to or countering the expectation to gain professional and financial success. “Jim Crow,” choreographer Leni Sloan describes, “was a dance that started on the plantations as a result of dancing being outlawed in 1690. Dancing was said to be ‘crossing your feet’ by the church. And so the slaves created a way of shuffling and sliding to safely glide around the laws without crossing their feet.”\textsuperscript{23} The origin of the Jim Crow stereotype comes from a dance enslaved Blacks performed to transgress oppressive rules about physical movement justified by religion.

Throughout the film \textit{Ethnic Notions}, Rolle continues to reveal that the transgressive dance engendered temporary freedom from oppressive rules about body movement; however, white male performer T.D. Rice appropriated the dance to create the disparaging Jim Crow stereotype: “According to legend, T.D. Rice saw a crippled black man dancing an exaggerated


\textsuperscript{23} Riggs.
Jim Crow dance. Rice took the man’s tattered clothes and that night imitated him on stage.”

White male performers then began to widely perform the Jim Crow character T.D. Rice created. Sloan’s synthesis of blackface’s origin in the film Ethnic Notions emphasizes the wide-ranging effects of dehumanizing perceptions on African-Americans in general, and audience perceptions of Black performers, specifically:

Here we have Jim Crow, T.D. Rice, taking a dance that was altered by a law, from a man who was crippled, and exaggerating it again, and he had no intention of presenting truth. But what was bought by the majority of people in Ohio, in Louisiana Territory, along the Erie Canal, was that this was a true image, and it was a devastating image. People in small towns who had never seen blacks and who suddenly saw that bought it as a black image.24

Considering Sloan’s explanation, blackface functions as a cultural domain of power that highlights how appropriations of Black performance by whites led to devastating representational and material violence against Black people. While representing a man, this caricatured performance of Jim Crow, which “had no intention of presenting truth,” also led to caricatured representations of Black women.

Within the entertainment industry, blackface minstrelsy is a social, cultural, and ideological performance that shapes audience perceptions of Black women singer-celebrities. Specifically, the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire caricatures powerfully impact images of Black women generally, and Black women singers specifically. Rolle describes the stereotypical image of the Black mammy figure: “With her hair hidden beneath a bandanna, her ample weight, dark skin and coarse manners, the Mammy was stripped of sexual allure.”25 In the film Ethnic Notions, Barbara Christian explains that the “mammy strikes at two important concepts of gender in antebellum society. She is strong, asexual, and ugly when a woman is supposed to be

24 Riggs.
25 Riggs.
Reznik, Staging Intersectionality

beautiful, fragile, dependent. She is a controller of her own people, of the males in her own society when the female should be dependent and subordinate.” Used during the antebellum period to justify the enslavement of “docile” Black women, the mammy caricature shaped Greenfield’s performance context, but she also strove to resist the caricature. For instance, her performance of the sorrowful and hopeful song “The Vision of the Negro Slave” challenged slavery as an institution, and countered the docility of slavery that the mammy stereotype constructed.²⁶

Towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, caricatures of Black women circulated in popular culture to further justify dehumanizing treatment of African-Americans. Carolyn M. West²⁷ explains that “[i]n addition to caregiving Mammies, African American women are often portrayed as sexually irresponsible, promiscuous Jezebels and as angry, combative Sapphires.”²⁸ These caricatures influenced what and how Black women singers performed on the stage. For instance, in Lemonade, when Knowles-Carter flaunts her sexuality in “Six Inch,” she represents the sex industry as both an honorable and oppressive profession, both reinforcing and challenging the Jezebel stereotype; in the song “Hold Up,” she aggressively

²⁶ The Black Swan at Home and Abroad; or, a biographical sketch of Miss Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the American Vocalist. Philadelphia: Wm. S. Young, Printer, 1855, p. 54.
Reznik, Staging Intersectionality

swings her baseball bat, “Hot Sauce,” smashing car windows while she smiles, both reinforcing and challenging the Sapphire caricature.

Historically the caricatures blackface minstrelsy created and circulated engender both liberation and oppression for Black women singer-celebrities. Blackface minstrelsy powerfully impacted Black female singer-celebrities’ capacity to control what they performed, who they performed for, and the way audiences perceived them. Their performances simultaneously worked within and against the objectifying caricatures because to deconstruct and denaturalize the stereotype, they must perform the stereotype. For instance, in the 1890s, Sissieretta Jones appropriated the “Black Patti” name to strategically market her own show, “Black Patti’s Troubadours,” using the name that both compliments her and denies her individuality by comparing her to Adelina Patti. She also strategically used the popularity of Black musical comedies, originally called “coon shows,” which re-appropriated the minstrel show in which white performers donned Blackface and performed disparaging stereotypical representations of blackness.29 Because she could not access concert halls like her white women counterparts, Jones instead sang opera selections and spirituals at the end of her show rather than closing with the typical cakewalk,30 the disparaging, popular art form of minstrelsy. Jones injected her agency

30 The origins of the cakewalk as they manifest in minstrel shows are akin to the origins of the Jim Crow dance and caricature. In the antebellum period, whites held dances on plantations where “slaves watched as the white dancers, dressed in their finest clothes, promenaded ceremoniously as couples around the ballroom” (123-4). Later, slaves would imitate the white dancers, mocking their “high manners and pompous, self-important airs” (124); they would do this amongst themselves, but also “slave owners and other white onlookers were entertained and amused by these comical performances, and perhaps failing to realize that they were the ones being ridiculed, they saw these dances as an amusing and entertaining performance of a supposedly inferior race.” These performances became competitions, where the best performance would win a cake. Into the twentieth century, white minstrel performers appropriated the dance which ridiculed them in the service of creating another dehumanizing representation of blackness.
and talent to resist oppressive stereotypes of blackness. The following chapters will pinpoint and
analyze the representations of these complicated, fruitful, intersectional moments to argue that
Black women singer-celebrities resisted the oppressive domains of power they navigated, and
that for Black women singers, resistance involves the complex interplay of the past and present,
performing stereotypes to counter them. Resistance takes many forms and must be analyzed in
specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. By searching for, identifying, and situating
Black women singer-celebrities’ and writers’ voices, we can begin to re-read Black female
singers’ representations in historical biography and fictional works anew. Greenfield’s strategic
choices of self-presentation which simultaneously draw upon the “angel in the house” ideal for
white femininity that Coventry Patmore initiated in his 1854 narrative poem, the de-sexualized
mammy stereotype, and the sexually-powerful opera singer to find success in the antebellum
entertainment industry more complexly inform our understanding of Knowles-Carter’s strategic
choices to present herself as a sexual subject who makes implicitly and explicitly political
statements on her raced, gendered, and classed experiences as an artist, mother, wife, daughter,
and sister. Hopkins’s fictional representations of Dianthe Lusk’s experiences within and beyond
the entertainment industry as a Black woman emphasize the continued significance of poets such
as Tyehimba Jess and Morgan Parker poetically imagining Jones’s and Knowles-Carter’s
invisible and silent experiences in their respective entertainment industries. I argue that bringing
these voices and representations into relation with each other provide a way to interrogate
existing narratives of performance and resistance in order to contribute to a world-making which
honors the nuances power dynamics and performers’ agency within social justice movements.

(Jamison, Phil. “The Cakewalk” from Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of
Chapter Overview

Chapter 1: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield

My project begins with Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the first prominently known Black woman popular and classical singer in the antebellum period. This chapter first focuses on manifestations of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s speaking, singing, and writing voice in *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad; or, A Biographical Sketch of Miss Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, The American Vocalist* published by William S. Young (1855), which charts a significant fragment of Greenfield’s life as she enters the capitalist system as the first Black woman singer and celebrity in the United States. I argue that Greenfield’s voice in lyrics she sang, letters she wrote, and under-cited texts by Black women, illuminate the nuances of the power systems she navigated to enrich the existing representations of her lived experience in twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship.

Building upon the work of musicologists including Julia Chybowski, Sara Lampert, Eidsheim and Karpf, who have recovered Greenfield’s history primarily through published reviews of her performances, I re-imagine the archive by foregrounding Greenfield’s performances and voice to illuminate the diverse, nuanced representations of resistance and empowerment that she and Black women who write about her enact. Specifically, I assert that the particular ways in which Greenfield navigated interpersonal domains of power (including

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documented interactions between Greenfield and her white patron, Harriet Beecher Stowe),
cultural domains of power (including Greenfield’s song lyrics which resist the dominant cultural
domain of power, blackface minstrelsy), and structural domains of power (including her
performance contract as an African-American woman within antebellum America’s legal
system), which appear in the archival texts Young’s biography compiles, are essential to
consider alongside the prevailing narratives that published reviews about her, and scholarship
that focuses on published reviews about her. Focusing on her voice showcases the artistic and
political strategies she enacted as the first prominent Black woman singer-celebrity in the United
States.

I will also focus on Black women’s responses to Greenfield, which have remained
peripheral at best in institutions that, as Crenshaw reminds us, render them invisible. Black
women’s texts about Greenfield that have largely been absent in scholarship include writings by
nineteenth-century journalist Jennie Carter and diarist Emilie Frances Davis, as well as scholars
including historians Wilhelmina S. Robinson and Darlene Clark Hine, musicologist Georgia A.
Ryder, and, of course, author Pauline Hopkins. Closer analysis of Black women’s writings about
Greenfield and Black women singer-celebrities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will
allow me to deepen my exploration of Greenfield and later Black women celebrities’ voices.
This chapter shows how Black women writers make Greenfield’s simultaneous experiences of
freedom and oppression visible, countering the cultural force of critical reviews by white and
Black male authors who reinforced the entertainment industry’s oppressive domains of power.

Chapter 2: Pauline Hopkins

In chapter two, I argue that Pauline Hopkins’s “Famous Women of the Negro Race”
(1901), a non-fiction, serialized feature in The Colored American Magazine which begins with
Greenfield, and her fictional representation of biracial soprano character Dianthe Lusk in the novel *Of One Blood; Or, The Hidden Self* in the *Colored American Magazine* (1903) theorize how Black women singers negotiated the empowerment and oppression. Of One Blood opens in a university in Boston around the turn of the twentieth century. Medical students Reuel Briggs and Aubrey Livingston emerge early in the text and attend a concert of the Fisk University Singers, where they become obsessed with the star soprano, Dianthe Lusk. The university, the concert hall, the hospital, and the domestic space serve as institutions in Hopkins fictional narrative which showcase Lusk’s complex experiences of oppression and empowerment as a Black woman singer-celebrity in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Amidst the novel’s alluring ghost stories, Aubrey’s deadly scheming, and Reuel’s travelling back in time to ancient Ethiopia, Hopkins shows how Dianthe’s voice, story, and experience is easily elided by audiences (regardless of their race, class, and gender) within domains of power that render African-American women silent and invisible.

Through fiction, Hopkins shows Dianthe’s difficulty navigating an entertainment industry that renders her invisible and silent. In this light, this chapter asks, how does fiction provide an understanding of Black women celebrities’ subjectivity? What does expanding focus from Dianthe’s voice to include her bodily presence illuminate about Black women celebrities, power dynamics, and history? This chapter reads Hopkins’ performance as a writer (warning of the alarming nonchalance with which individuals and institutions respond to Dianthe’s

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32 Hopkins’s “Famous Women” feature newly theorized Greenfield as a Black woman singer by reconciling the contradictory nature of her liberation and oppression. Yet, Hopkins remains largely absent from contemporary literary, historical, and musicological work about Greenfield.  

33 The Fisk University Singers are a historical group of African-American student-singers who performed spirituals for prominently white audiences. Their performances were fundraisers for the University, one of the first African-American universities in the United States.
disappearance to consider how she’s oppressed along the axes of race, class, and gender) representing Dianthe Lusk as a Black woman singer-celebrity to answer these questions. I argue that Hopkins represents a “return to the past” to enhance audience understanding of “the interplay between past and present.” The interplay between her non-fictional, historical account of Greenfield and her fictional representation of Dianthe Lusk introduced a new form of archival formation that involves re-imagining narratives of what performance and empowerment are and can accomplish. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Hopkins established an interplay between the past (non-fictional representation of Greenfield) and present (fictional representation of Dianthe Lusk); however, as twenty-first century audience members, we can reflect on the interplay of our past (which includes both the non-fictional representation of Greenfield and the fictional representation of Dianthe Lusk) and the present (performers and representations of performers I will analyze in my following chapters).

Chapter 3: Sissieretta Jones

In chapter three I argue that Tyehimba Jess’s poetry collection *Olio* (2016) poetically represents how “return[ing] to the past” can enhance audience understanding of “the interplay between past and present” by imagining how Sissieretta Jones strategically shaped her performances and celebrity status by acquiescing to and countering oppressive stereotypes and assumptions the entertainment industry perpetuated in the early twentieth century United States. Jess imagines an archive of Jones’s performances and perceptions to make her experiences as a Black woman working towards artistic and financial success visible and audible; in doing so, I

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35 Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond, p. 5.
argue that Jess provides a way of understanding the complexity of contemporary singer-celebrities’ shaping their subjectivity.

For African-Americans navigating entertainment and publishing industries that suppress their voices, poetry is a powerful way to distill experience, document existence, communicate succinct political messages, and shape subjectivity. From Phillis Wheatley, the first published Black woman poet in the United States, to now, African-American women, have used poetry to assert their subjectivity and circulate their voices within domains of power that dehumanize and silence them. Poet and cultural critic Audre Lorde writes, “[A]s we come more into touch with our own ancient, non-european (sic) consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes” (36). For Lorde, as a Black woman invested in dismantling power systems that render Black women’s perspectives and experiences mute and invisible, “poetry is not a luxury,” as it articulates and documents truths in ways that other institutions render invisible and mute.

Chapter 4: Beyoncé Knowles-Carter

This chapter centers Knowles-Carter’s voice to consider how her performances, brought into the archive of Black women celebrities, can help us understand how she and earlier Black women singer-celebrities enact resistance strategies within their respective entertainment industries. In analyzing Knowles-Carter’s contemporary performances, I argue that her artistic choices theorize Black female celebrity through performances of resistance to the Black and white male gaze. For instance, I argue that her performances in the videos “Video Phone” and “Telephone” engage the stereotypes of Black women who “are often portrayed as sexually
irresponsible, promiscuous Jezebels and as angry, combative Sapphires.”36 While she portrays unwieldy sexuality for the male gaze (as represented by Black and white men in the music videos), she ultimately, violently, and literally destroys the male gaze by shooting the men’s heads that turn into video cameras. Significantly, Knowles-Carter uses a stereotypical representation of feminine, sexual allure to draw her audience in, and then uses aggressive violence to destroy and critique the male gaze. I also intervene in scholarship on Knowles-Carter by arguing that Morgan Parker’s poetic representations of Beyoncé in There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé showcases a Black woman’s response to Beyoncé, both embracing her and critiquing her as she worked through her artistry and gained access to performance opportunities by reinforcing and resisting the Jezebel and Sapphire caricatures in her “Video Phone” and “Telephone” performances. In analyzing Knowles-Carter’s performances by drawing upon Parker’s poetry, I intervene in critical reviews that turned Knowles-Carter into what feminist scholar Brittany Cooper identifies as a “brand instead of a human being, a stealthy rhetorical move that enabled them to distance themselves from her and then drag her for filth without compunction.”37 The dichotomy of “brand” versus “human being” suggests a binary of “object” versus “subject.” I argue that through her artistry (including her entire oeuvre, social media presence, and more), Beyoncé strategically shapes her celebrity by highlighting her subjectivity as a Black woman artist and her brand as a businesswoman. As such, I suggest that Parker highlights the dehumanizing consequences and empowering aspects of understanding Beyoncé

37 Brittany Cooper, Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower, p. 31.
as a brand; the poetry showcases how critique and celebration of an African-American woman singer must productively co-exist in archival formation.

In addition, I will analyze the visual album Lemonade and Knowles-Carter’s 2018 Coachella performance to center her voice and perspective on her identity and social context to enrich understandings of her raced and gendered experiences within power systems. In doing so, this chapter foregrounds Knowles-Carter’s own voice to theorize African-American women’s experiences in the entertainment industry, arguing that her performances contribute to an archive of Black women celebrities’ performances of oppression and liberation.38

Conclusion

My conclusion reflects on the academic, pedagogical, and socio-cultural ramifications of understanding the complexity of “Freedom” in theorizations of Black female celebrity. In focusing on the diverse ways that Black women singers and writers draw upon, counter, and reject caricatures of Black womanhood, I trouble the focus on published reviews by prominently white authors that shape understandings of their talent and artistry, extend the archive of cultural materials to literary texts, and recognize how their artistic strategies engender empowerment to expand understandings of how Black female singers shape and perform celebrity.39 Close-reading cultural texts that represent Greenfield’s performances including her song lyrics, letters,

38 For further information on literary scholars analyzing race and celebrity, see PMLA, Vol. 126, No. 4, Special Topic: Celebrity, Fame, Notoriety (October 2011) edited by Joseph A. Boone and Nancy J. Vickers.
39 In Embodied Avatars, Uri McMillan focuses on “focus[es] on performance art staged by black women” to “fiercely rebuk[e] two standard art world assumptions: the perceived incommensurability of “black” and “avant-garde,” and the marginalization of black female artists within our conceptions of feminist art.” McMillan seeks “both to trouble the focus on white female subjectivity that serves as an unofficial norm and to recognize that the initial prejudice the black art world cognoscenti expressed toward performance art was tied to the gender of its practitioners” (3).
contract, and photographs provide a deeper understanding of her social context, build upon musicological scholarship that has prominently focused on published reviews by white authors, and expand her representation within the historical record; in other words, in analyzing these previously unexamined texts by focusing on how they make her experiences within the antebellum entertainment system visible and audible, we return to a more comprehensive past to, as celebrity studies emphasizes, understand the interplay between the past and present. Hopkins’s non-fiction and fiction writing draws upon Greenfield to understand Black women singer-celebrities’ social context at the beginning of the twentieth century, while past Black women performers who differently resisted blackface minstrelsy impacted Jones’s performances and resistance strategies. Knowles-Carter, as well as poets Jess and Parker, inherit a past comprised of these women’s resistance strategies. Listening to these performers and writers together honors the innovative performance strategies that brought together classical and popular music performances, as well as academic and popular writings, all which provide critical insights for literary, musicological, celebrity, and historical studies.

Pedagogically, in the context of literary, historical, and musicological classes, the challenges of teaching students about the understudied histories of Black women singers in large part stems from the difficulty of teaching about the history of minstrelsy. The pedagogical ramifications of bringing texts by and about Black women singer-celebrities bridge into the socio-cultural ramifications of understanding the complexities of liberation and oppression. Historian Rhae Lynn Barnes asserts that minstrelsy has “been institutionalized into every aspect of American life. People have perpetuated blackface because we don’t teach minstrel history. If these people had ever been exposed to it in a safe classroom environment, they would know
better.” While teaching about the origins of minstrelsy leads to potentially perpetuating its caricatured stereotypes, Black female singers, past and present, provide ways to understand the complex interplay between oppressive domains of power and enacting liberation. Students already know that the music they listen to is simultaneously empowering and oppressive—they are in many ways already engaging in what Hip Hop feminist Joan Morgan identifies as “a feminism that is brave enough to fuck with the grays.” Morgan, in other words, emphasizes, as the Black women singer-celebrities of this study perform, that there is no one right way to resist. To “fuck with the grays” is to consider Greenfield’s, Hopkins’s, Jones’s, and Knowles-Carter’s performances as both sexualized and empowering, as both modest and revolutionary. Students know that Beyoncé’s, Cardi B’s, Rihanna’s, Lizzo’s, Solange’s, Nicki Minaj’s, and other contemporary Black women’s performances are complexly situated within a society that both challenges and reinforces sexism, racism, and classism. So, why not further develop their literary and historical critical tools to analyze by listening to what Black women singers can teach us as students, and, as citizens?

A true, genuine awareness of our identities and how they affect power dynamics across our interactions requires consistent diligence, and is never complete. As a queer white woman, I’m tired of hearing statements from other white people like “What does Beyoncé have to do with me as a white guy?” and “Oprah is so arrogant.” I’m tired of hearing those with higher degrees of education critique Beyoncé as uneducated because of her grammar choices—although I’ll never tired of sending them the link to Black Girl Dangerous’s article “What’s worst?: A

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

Beyoncé Grammar Adventure” to discuss how incorrect grammar (in the case of “What’s worst” isn’t actually incorrect) doesn’t mean that a message is any less legitimate than a message that is delivered in Standard English.42 I’m tired of attending conferences that silence women, and don’t even do the work to include scholars of color—although I’ll never tire of having difficult conversations with my fellow white colleagues on why including diverse scholars’ perspectives are essential to fostering a thriving scholarly environment. I’m tired of hearing lectures that begin the history of music from a Western standpoint and cite examples of white men singers and scholars *ad nauseum* without blinking an eye—although I’ll never tire of being the person to ask how whiteness plays a role in how they’re imagining their critical histories and methodologies. I’m even more tired of hearing students of color talk about the microaggressions they face from their white professors, peers, and random people in their life each day—although I’ll never tire of listening to them, and strategizing with them on how they can empower themselves.

We need to do better. This project is an act of love in that it humbly stages a form of intersectional scholarship that draws upon the brilliant work of Black women scholars, writers, and singer-celebrities. A necessary facet of this act of love as a white woman scholar entails learning how to listen better, teaching other white people the ways in which we can be aware of power dynamics that crystallized in the nineteenth century and are still present in systems that we can and cannot see today. We need to continue to learn how to tactfully honor the successes of Black women scholars, writers, and celebrities while still interrogating the ways in which we perpetuate oppression, whether knowingly or not. Liberation doesn’t negate the existence of

oppression, and oppression doesn’t negate the existence of liberation. One way white people can begin to counter racism is to listen to the experiences of others without judgment and learn from them what we can. Foregrounding marginalized voices allows white people to learn how to listen better, and, to strategize how to collaboratively foster collective, genuine equality.
Chapter 1: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield

When treasured nuggets from a store of common knowledge are disturbed, intellectual and social upheavals can occur. Efforts to shed new light on a familiar idea are resisted, rejected, belittled and derided because “everyone knows.”

—Georgia A. Ryder

I should have looked well to the lady—for the black moire antique silk in which I was clad was the gift of Mrs. Stowe, and made under her own direction. It cost her seventy-five dollars.

—Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield

Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield was born into slavery. When she was one, her mistress Mrs. Greenfield, inspired by the Society of Friends’ abolitionist beliefs, freed Elizabeth’s family members and brought Elizabeth with her to Philadelphia. Greenfield’s formal musical

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1 “Black Women in Song: Some Socio-Cultural Images,” a paper read at the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History meeting in Atlanta (October 1975, p. 601).
2 Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s response, an African-American woman music teacher who became a singer and celebrity, upon being read Harriet Beecher Stowe’s review of her 1853 performance in London (p. 46, original italics). The biographical sketch documents Greenfield’s voice, including two sentences that have separate beginning quotation marks that could potentially signify that Young intentionally chose two quotes rather than including Greenfield’s entire response.
3 Greenfield’s obituary in the New York Times (2 Apr. 1876) explains that she was born “sixty-eight years ago” in 1808, while the Dictionary of American Negro Biography edited by Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982) both identifies her birth year as 1809 and explains that “According to her court testimony in 1847, she was born in 1817 (268). In “Abolitionism’s Resonant Bodies: The Realization of African American Performance” (American Quarterly, 63, No. 3, (2011), pp. 619-39), Alex W. Black describes that “Greenfield was probably born in the 1820s” (p. 625).
4 Published sources on Greenfield, from the antebellum period into the contemporary moment, explain that Greenfield’s mistress was a Quaker, which creates drama around the woman discovering that Elizabeth was playing music, which, at the time in the Society of Friends, was looked down upon as an earthly practice. Mrs. Greenfield still allowing Elizabeth to study music becomes a benevolent, well-meaning, and rather rebellious act for Elizabeth’s sake. However, closer research reveals that there is no existing evidence to confirm Mrs. Greenfield’s
development began when “the daughter of a friendly physician, having heard her sing, began to
give her lessons. She was making rapid progress when someone informed Mrs. Greenfield about
what was going on.” After hearing Elizabeth sing, Mrs. Greenfield supported her continued
musical education and paid Elizabeth to be her caregiver until she died in 1845. While Mrs.
Greenfield left Elizabeth “$500 plus $100 continual annuity in her will, trustees and lawyers
suspended payments for over a decade while they debated the widow’s intentions and mental
conditions at the time of signing the will.” Because of this failed legal transaction, Greenfield
had to find other means of surviving in a capitalist economy. First becoming a music teacher and
then a celebrated performer, Greenfield spent her adult life navigating economic systems that
reinforced, and arguably still reinforce, racism, sexism, and classism.

participation in Quakerism beyond being inspired by and close friends with members of the
Society of Friends in Philadelphia.
5 Benjamin Griffith Brawley, The Negro Genius: A New Appraisal of the Achievement of the
6 Twentieth-century representations of Greenfield capitalize on the potential drama of Greenfield
revealing to her mistress that she was practicing music by stating that her mistress was a Quaker.
In the nineteenth century, music was looked down upon by Friends because of the worldliness of
it and the distraction it caused. Both Brawley’s 1966 monograph, and before that Agnes
Richard’s November 1950 article in the popular magazine Negro Digest, imagine a dramatic
conversation in which the mistress asks, “Is it true?” and Greenfield, “trembling” from fear,
responds “It is true.” Did Greenfield indeed say, “It is true,” when her mistress Mrs. Greenfield
asked her if she was learning music? Or did Brawley and Richards imagine this interaction to
shape Greenfield’s speaking back within an interpersonal domain of power that they, and their
readers, could conceptualize? S. Paige Baty provides a way of understanding how and why
Greenfield’s representation might have evolved in twentieth-century representations: “The
changing characters and shapes of icons reflect the conversations and contestations of changing
political cultural orders. An icon does not remain static; it appears in different forms at various
1995, p. 60).
7 Julia J. Chybowski, “Becoming the ‘Black Swan’ in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America:
Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s Early Life and Debut Concert Tour.” Journal of the American
The known remaining archives related to Greenfield reveal to us, unsurprisingly and most prominently, the racist and sexist published reviews of her performances. Specifically, many reviews that appear in William S. Young’s biographical sketch *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad; or, A Biographical Sketch of Miss Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, The American Vocalist*, published in Philadelphia in 1855, explain that her success was driven by curious audiences buying tickets to her performances because of her racial identity. At the beginning of her career, for instance, a Rochester newspaper critic writes that, “All sorts of surmises and conjectures have been indulged in, respecting the claim put forth of her merit, and generally the impression seemed to prevail that the novelty of ‘colour’ and idle curiosity, accounted more for the excitement raised, than for her musical powers.”

During the antebellum period in the United States, blackface minstrelsy played a significant role in dehumanizing Black performers on stage, and impacting audience perceptions of Black performers. Traditional representations of blackness on the concert stage were most prominently performed by white performers in blackface; Greenfield performed ballads such as Italian composer Domenico Gaetano Maria Donizetti’s ballad “Holy beauty! child of nature,” as well as songs that white performers in blackface, and fellow white women singers like Lind not in blackface, also performed, including Stephen Foster’s “Old folks at home.” She was both performing the music of white supremacy in order to access the concert stage, while also asserting her talent on a stage that historically excluded Black women.

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8 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad; or, a biographical sketch of Miss Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the American Vocalist* (Philadelphia: Wm. S. Young, Printer, 1855), p. 8.
9 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 61.
10 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 61.
There are obvious limitations to considering antebellum biographies by white men about a black woman in the United States as Chybowski reveals; however, the biography includes understudied essential documents that provide touchstones to Greenfield’s voice and material conditions that only a primary text can provide. Building upon the work of musicologists including Julie Chybowski, Nina Sun Eidsheim, Sara Lampert, and Juanita Karpf who have recovered Greenfield’s history primarily through published reviews of her performances, this chapter analyzes Young’s biography which documents Greenfield’s experience as the first prominent Black woman popular and classical singer within and beyond the United States during the antebellum period.

While many reviews of Greenfield’s performances do comment on and describe her virtuosity, these reviews are framed in terms of “testing” Greenfield’s talent and still pivot on surprise of her talent because of her race. For example, a published review from the *Utica Daily Observer* on January 18, 1852 reflects on Greenfield’s talent considering the audience couldn’t fathom it was her singing because the “specimen of her notes” didn’t match their expectations for a Black woman’s talent:

> The songs she gave, were in the main very difficult of execution, and well calculated to test the qualities of the Swan. The manner in which she gave ‘The Last Rose of Summer,’ elicited an encore, when she gave a specimen of her notes,
which were so supernatural for a feminine, as to excite belief that a male biped was usurping her prerogative. The deepest bass of the most wonderful barytone [sic] could not surpass it, and the greatest wonder was excited. “Kathleen Mavourneen,” and “O, Native Scenes,” were remarkably well sung. The only failure we noticed was on some of the high notes, in pieces requiring very rapid execution, where she seemed to want that faculty of rapid and easy transition, so remarkable in Jenny Lind and Kate Hayes.\textsuperscript{13}

This review is indicative of the many published reviews that overwhelm Greenfield’s archival presence. The enduring qualities of these reviews include audience disbelief and surprise that an African-American could display such talent; they also minimize her accomplishments by comparing Greenfield to her white counterparts. In fact, Greenfield’s stage name comes from audiences who compare her to Lind, whose popular stage name was the “Swedish Nightingale.”\textsuperscript{14} Many published reviews prominently focus on Greenfield’s performances of the ballads her white counterparts also performed. Critical reviews repeatedly compared Greenfield to Lind, which the “Black Swan” label most obviously evidences; these comparisons deny Greenfield individuality and continue to rationalize her success considering her race and not her talent. Because audience reviews comprise the bulk of examined archival materials about Greenfield, narratives around curiosity and white women singers persist, obscuring understanding of Greenfield’s talent and resistance to blackface minstrelsy. Countering blackface minstrelsy as a powerful cultural domain of power (the white-supremacist tradition of blackface minstrelsy which shaped hegemonic discourses, specifically audiences’ stereotypical perceptions

\textsuperscript{13} The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 11. The end of this passage references two world famous singers; Jenny Lind (1820-1887) was a Swedish-born soprano and Kate Hayes (1818-1861) was an Irish-born soprano.

\textsuperscript{14} For instance, the Buffalo Musical Association proclaimed, “Give the ‘Black Swan,’ said they, the cultivation and experience of the fair Swede, or Md’lle Parodi, and she will rank favourably [sic] with those popular singers, who have carried the nation into captivity by their rare musical abilities” (The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 5).
of Black performers) played a key role in Greenfield’s representation of herself, her voice, and her body.

This chapter analyzes the song lyrics she sang, letters she wrote, managerial contract she signed, and a photograph of her that does not appear in Young’s biography, to explore Greenfield’s material conditions as a Black woman singer in the entertainment industry. Considering Kimberlé Crenshaw’s assertion that, “race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences,”15 this chapter asks how to responsibly work with archival materials created within financial, legal, and entertainment institutions that historically render Black women silent and/or invisible. Regarding Greenfield specifically, how do we comprehend her voice through the discourses produced by those who represented her? How can archival materials help us understand in part how she navigated the performance industry within her complex social context? Approaching Greenfield’s representation in Young’s biography with these questions in mind, I argue, draws needed attention to the ways in which systems of oppression deny Black women—even those who have achieved celebrity status—the agency and privileges enjoyed by their white counterparts.

Greenfield and Stowe: An Intersectional Reading of the Performance Context

In May 1853, shortly after Greenfield arrived in London and her tour manager abandoned her, she met with Harriet Beecher Stowe, who connected her with Lord Shaftsbury. A politician and social reformer, Shaftsbury hosted a concert for her to perform and raise money to sustain herself while in London. In her description of the performance Lord Shaftsbury hosted at

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

Stafford House that she published in *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (1854) and Young’s biography quotes at length, Stowe describes Greenfield’s physical appearance and bearing:

She is not handsome, but looked very well. She has a pleasing dark face, wore a black velvet head-dress, and white cornelian ear-rings (sic), a black moire antique silk, made high in the neck, with white lace falling sleeves, and white gloves. A certain gentleness of manner and self-possession, the result of the universal kindness shown her, sat well upon her.16

Stowe first comments on Greenfield’s physical features, and then her manner, all a culmination of “the universal kindness shown her” by her patrons. This condescending, however well-meaning, commentary reveals the stereotype of black people needing “universal kindness shown” by white people to develop “gentleness of manner,” highlighting Greenfield’s experiences as impacted by the hegemonic discourses she performs within. Since Greenfield, in Stowe’s perspective, challenges the racist, sexist, and classist entertainment industry’s implicit and explicit hegemonic discourses through her dress and manner, she achieves access to the performance space.

A product of the cultural and structural domains of power that sought to separate Greenfield’s body and voice, Stowe shifts attention away from Greenfield’s body, bracketing it to engage her artistry and voice. Stowe explains that Greenfield’s voice “was beautiful” and that:

Her voice, with its keen, searching fire, its penetrating vibrant quality, its ‘timbre,’ as the French have it, cuts its way like a Damascus blade to the heart. It was the more touching from the occasional rusticities and artistic defects, which showed that she had received no culture from art. She sung the ballad, “Old folks at home,” giving one verse in the soprano, and another in the tenor voice. As she stood partially concealed by the piano, Chevalier Bunsen thought that the tenor part was performed by one of the gentlemen. He

16 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 45.
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was perfectly astonished when he discovered that it was by her. This was rapturously encored.\textsuperscript{17}

Stowe romanticizes Greenfield’s “rustic and defected” talent by explaining that she has yet had no influence of “culture from art.” In this both condescending and well-meaning description, Stowe reveals the racist, sexist, and classist entertainment industry’s implicit and explicit hegemonic discourses that shapes assumptions about Black talent. Stowe herself strategically calls attention to Greenfield’s physical appearance first, as so many of the critical reviews of her do, but she then shifts and maintains focus on her voice.

Stowe’s further documentation of her experience at Greenfield’s concert exhibits the interactions between Greenfield as performer and other individuals which illuminates audience perception of Greenfield. Young’s biography continues by including Stowe’s conversation with “Chevalier Bunsen, the Prussian Ambassador”: “He looked at her with much interest. ‘Are the race often as good looking?’ he said. I said, ‘She is not handsome compared with many, though I confess she looks uncommonly well to-day.’”\textsuperscript{18} Both Stowe and Bunsen first judge Greenfield’s physical appearance. Bunsen’s comments reveal the material conditions that Greenfield navigates in which audiences fixate and comment upon her appearance; specifically, within the antebellum period where Black bodies were chattel property, Bunsen views Greenfield with an eye towards calculating her value as it connects to physical attractiveness. His comments are also contradictory. Bunsen identifies Greenfield as “good looking” yet also articulates that “[s]he is not handsome compared with many.” These comments, like Stowe’s strategic, initial focus on Greenfield’s body in comparison to other women, denies her individuality as well as calls

\textsuperscript{17} The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 46.  
\textsuperscript{18} The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 45.
attention to and denaturalizes the binary of white beauty and black ugliness. On one hand, Bunsen’s question inquires if African-Americans are more beautiful than cultural forces have led him to think. However well-meaning, both Stowe and Bunsen inevitably uphold the racist, sexist, and classist entertainment industry’s implicit and explicit hegemonic discourses. Stowe similarly objectifies her by comparing her to other black women. The conversation that Stowe documents reveals her various racist and sexist stereotypes of Black women that denied Greenfield individuality; even before her performances began, her corporeal presence on stage necessitated working against these forces to legitimize her presence on stage.

Stowe describes how Greenfield’s talent is measured as impacted by the hegemonic discourses that shape her experiences. Specifically, Stowe describes, “Between the parts, Sir George took her to the piano, and tried her voice by skips, striking notes here and there at random, without connexion (sic), from D in alto to A first space in bass clef”; this moment reflects Greenfield as a specimen whose skills must be tested and proven in evaluation by the audience. Stowe explains that Greenfield achieved success by challenging assumptions about Black talent: “she followed with unerring precision, striking the sound nearly at the same instant his finger touched the key.” Within Greenfield’s performance of pitch-matching, the response of “a burst of applause” signifies that Greenfield surpasses everyone’s expectations of her talent by her impressive range. Greenfield participates and, based on Stowe’s description, arguably controls this disciplinary domain of power through her performance through her command of matching the tones; we can understand the power dynamics of this situation through Collins and Bilge’s “lens of mutual construction,” as Greenfield sang in multiple registers and proved her

19 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 46.
20 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 46.
talent in the face of race and gender expectations. This moment affirms Stowe’s assertion that Greenfield needs the cultivation to reach her greatest potential, and, that as an African-American woman within a racist entertainment industry, can perform as well as or even better than her white counterparts with the same access to “culture as art.”

After Stowe’s account of the performance ends, Greenfield’s voice emerges within an interpersonal domain of power in the one moment where Young’s biography directly quotes her: “When Mrs. Stowe’s account of the concert was read to Miss Greenfield, she remarked — ‘I should have looked well to the lady—for the black moire antique silk in which I was clad was the gift of Mrs. Stowe, and made under her own direction. ‘It cost her seventy-five dollars’.”

Greenfield’s emphasis on “should” acknowledges her strategic navigation of her relationship with Stowe; she communicates that she chose to follow Stowe’s dress suggestion to achieve success in her performance and to connect with her audience and patrons. The direct quote’s representation of Greenfield’s choice and strategy makes her material conditions and perspective discernable. Greenfield’s voice highlights the systems of power, including the entertainment, financial, and legal systems that she navigated. Significantly, in this sole moment where Greenfield speaks in Young’s biography, she articulates her perspective on the complex relationship between her body and her voice, and another’s perception of her.

Greenfield strategically worked her relationship with Stowe to her benefit to construct her singer-celebrity status. For Stowe, buying a $75 dress was a forgettable occurrence, whereas for Greenfield, receiving one was not forgettable. While seeming to maintain decorum and politeness on the surface, sarcasm comes through in Greenfield’s response, which, in this

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21 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 46.
instance, is a form of resistance as Greenfield does not explicitly play into white sympathies by explicitly thanking Stowe. While Stowe is well-intentioned, Carla L. Peterson has shown how Stowe, wielding power as a white woman in Sojourner Truth’s life, exploited African-Americans’ experiences to write her own works and profit from them while furthering the abolitionist cause: “Yet the fact remains that much of Truth’s life and work is clouded in historical uncertainty, leaving us unable to answer many questions about her with any real assurance. If knowledge of a historical figure comes to us mediated by the perceptions of contemporaries and later historians, this is especially true of Truth.”

If Stowe contributed to the “historical uncertainty” of Truth, the same can most likely be said of Greenfield. Stowe’s comments on Greenfield’s physical presentation reflect material reality for women on the stage. Regardless, Stowe’s documentation of Greenfield, commenting on her dress, manner, and talent, helped both Stowe and Greenfield.

Peterson’s claim that Black women writers “create community” sheds light on Greenfield’s reply. Specifically, she shows that Black women writers also lead a lonely existence that located them above or outside of their community, and, on top of that reality, were not able to depend on black patronage solely. This is very much the case for Greenfield as well; as such, she had to navigate her interactions with Stowe carefully because within the systems of oppression she was navigating, she needed to, to use Kathy Glass’s conceptualization of “courting communities,” “call[ing] collectives into existence through diverse forms of subversive spiritual, political, and cultural work.”

Greenfield’s voice manifests in response to Stowe’s, a

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well-meaning however condescending white woman’s, dress suggestions, is a kind of political and cultural work that simultaneously speaks back to white people’s assumptions about Black people in antebellum America.

Greenfield’s response to Stowe writing about her both acknowledges that Stowe’s positive comments about her appearance reinforce expectations about whiteness and femininity within a racist and sexist entertainment industry that dehumanized Black women, and articulates thanks to Stowe since she bought her the dress. In this archive, we can reconsider Greenfield’s contemporary audiences who compared her to white women singers, and instead understand Greenfield’s performance context in relation to “black female evangelists such as Sojourner Truth,” who were celebrities in their own right, and whose work opposed “erasure of their realities in the culture of dominance” by establishing a “reclaiming of their black bodies and black selves as dignified subjects.”

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24 Most of what William S. Young (dates not known) published included various popular and religious works at 88 North Sixth Street in Philadelphia from the 1840s to 1860s. In addition to *The Evangelical Repository* (1852), *The Life and Diary of the Late Rev. Thomas B. Hanna, A.M., Pastor of the Associate Congregation of Clinton, PA* (1852), a folio of two color lithographs for a scientific stair builder (1864), Young also published *Fragmentary Records of the Youngs, Comprising In Addition to Much General Information Respecting Them, A Particular and Extended Account of the Posterity of Ninian Young, An early Resident of East Fallowfield Township, Chester County, Pa; Compiled from the Best Published and Other Sources* (1869), which provides a glimpse into the context in which Greenfield’s biography was published. *Fragmentary Records* explains that William S. Young was the guardian of John Russell Young (1840–, the first Librarian of Congress from 1897-1899. In 1855, John Russell Young first worked in New Orleans “in the office of the ‘Creole’ newspaper” (45-46), and then went to work in William S. Young’s Philadelphia publishing office. This text theorizes the limitations of documenting historical biography, which provides insight into the potentially progressive politics that lead to the publication of Greenfield’s biography.

25 My work is inspired by Richard Douglass-Chin’s analysis on black female evangelists including Sojourner Truth (p. 64).

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context, Greenfield’s only direct quote in Young’s biographical sketch speaks back to Stowe’s
text, reminding readers that Stowe bought the dress that she compliments for Greenfield;
moreover, Greenfield’s reaction provides a way to read Stowe’s text, and other texts immersed in
a racist, sexist, and classist culture regardless of individual, well-meaning intentions.

Young’s biography couches Greenfield’s spoken response between Stowe’s concert
review and a letter she sent to Greenfield; closer consideration of these two materials illuminate
how Greenfield communicates within the financial and social institutions as the first prominent
African-American woman singer in the United States during the antebellum period. After
Greenfield’s spoken response to Stowe’s review, the biography includes Stowe’s letter to
Greenfield which reiterates her vulnerable reality as a Black woman in antebellum America. In
this “interesting letter among her papers of this date,” that the unidentified narrator describes,
Stowe says that she sent the receipt for the dress with this letter, that Greenfield “had better keep,
lest by some mistake you be called upon to pay the bill bye and bye—such mistakes sometimes
happen.” As a white woman, having the receipt is a viable proof of purchase; however, a
receipt is insufficient proof for a black woman in the context of antebellum America. As
Peterson explains, in nineteenth century America when Black citizens were beginning to claim
equality at the theater, on public transportation, and in legislative and judicial systems, “The rule
of whimsy reigned.” Stowe’s comment highlights social inequality across race, regardless of
gender since she emphasizes that as a Black woman, Greenfield must keep her receipt to always
be able to prove that she does own the dress. Greenfield already knows this reality, as
Chybowski reveals in her historical recovery work that Greenfield’s mistress legally left her

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27 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 46.
money when she died, but because Greenfield was a Black woman, lawyers could avoid giving her the money that was rightfully hers, which led her to teach music and become a perform
This instance of proving that something is hers and not stolen highlights Stowe’s and Greenfield’s awareness of the “whimsy” that Peterson argues Black people were, and arguably still are, experiencing. The oral and financial transactions that Greenfield participated in with Stowe highlight the complex power dynamics for the first black woman performer in antebellum America.

Greenfield’s interactions with Stowe exemplify a complex relationship of collaborative empowerment and white exploitation. In her letter Stowe also explains, “There are a great many temptations in a life like yours, but if you pray to God, he will be your Father and help you always to do right and make your way plain before you.”

Disparaging cultural stereotypes about black women that circulated in print and minstrel performances impacted how white audiences perceived Greenfield on the stage. Greenfield’s response reveals her navigation of the entertainment industry she navigated daily; moreover, her interaction with Stowe as a white woman, “whose sympathy seemed ever to have followed her with a watchful care,” according to the unidentified narrator of Young’s biographical sketch, as Greenfield responds that Stowe bought Greenfield’s clothing that, according to Stowe’s own account, was instrumental to Greenfield’s successful Stafford House performance. Greenfield’s quoted response to Stowe’s account raises important questions regarding her navigation of power. Stowe, in her letter to Greenfield that Young’s biographical sketch includes, continues to explain, “Let me beg of you to be careful as to your dress. Do not dress low in the next—do not try for showy colours (sic)—

29 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 47.
30 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 46.
but keep a *plain modest* respectable style. It was for this purpose that I furnished you with a suit. These things are very important for one in your position, and if rightly managed will secure for you respect.”

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, women singers in the United States and Britain were constantly looked on as walking a moral line that could lead into sin. Another way to understand Stowe’s call for Greenfield to “be careful” in the way that she dresses is through the reality that Lama Rod Owens identifies as “the truth of the violence that can come from making white people uncomfortable.” The lines of personal dress choice, and dressing to please others are complicated; for Greenfield as an African-American woman in the United States during the antebellum period, appearing on a stage defined by a racist and sexist entertainment industry, self-presentation was not a matter of preference. It was a matter of defining Greenfield’s subjectivity within institutions that sought to dehumanize her.

These instances in Young’s biographical sketch of Greenfield illuminate “the problematics of self-representation” that black women faced during the nineteenth century; specifically, Black women singer-celebrities were representing themselves within and against the racist, sexist, and classist entertainment industry’s implicit and explicit hegemonic discourses. Considering the ways in which Black people in the United States were navigating structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal domains of power, in which the whims of white people

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31 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 47.
34 Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word*, p. 40.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

impacted how they moved through the world, Greenfield’s response to Stowe reveals her material conditions; even if she listened to every suggestion from well-meaning white people, the racist and sexist entertainment industry could lead to uncomfortable at best, and deadly at worst, situations. These exchanges with Stowe reveal how Greenfield negotiated shaping her own identity through dress as well as talent.\(^{35}\)

**Expanding the Archival Frame: Imagining Greenfield’s Response through Image**

Greenfield’s response to Stowe’s documentation of her performance reveal what Shawn Michelle Smith refers to as “the complicated visual dynamics of double consciousness.”\(^{36}\) Specifically, Greenfield was aware of how she needed to present herself to gain artistic and financial success. Young’s biography includes another letter from a well-meaning fan, signed E.S.M., similarly provides an idea of Greenfield navigating the whims of white people to gain

\(^{35}\) While the biographical sketch includes Stowe’s description of Greenfield’s performance and the letter Stowe wrote to Greenfield, in *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (Norton, 1996) Nell Irvin Painter explains Stowe’s propensity to rewrite black women’s representation; considering Painter’s reflections allows us to understand the potential erasure of Greenfield Stowe participated in as she wrote about Greenfield. Painter reminds us that along with “Truth’s feminist comrade Frances Dana Gage,” Stowe’s “The Libyan Sibyl…shapes today’s essence of Sojourner Truth” (164). How can that caution us as to how to read Stowe’s reflection on Greenfield’s performance? Painter explains that “Gage’s rendition of Truth far exceeds in drama Marius Robinson’s straightforward report from 1851. Through framing and elaboration, she turns Truth’s comments into a spectacular performance four times longer than his. (169) “Ar’n’t I a woman?” was Gage’s invention. Had Truth said it several times in 1851, as in Gage’s article, Marius Robinson, who was familiar with Truth’s diction, most certainly would have noted it. If he had an unusually tin ear, he might have missed it once, perhaps even twice. But not four times, as in Gage’s report. This rhetorical question inserts blackness into feminism and gender into racial identity. One of only a few black women regulars on the feminist and antislavery circuit, Truth was doing in Gage’s report the very same symbolic work of her personal presence in these meetings: she was the pivot that linked two causes—of women (presumed to be white) and of blacks (presumed to be men)- through one black female body. One phrase sums up the meaning of the emblematic Sojourner Truth today: “ar’n’t I a woman?” (171).  

success in the nineteenth century. In this letter that the biographical sketch includes from Utica dated January 13, 1853, E.S.M. identifies her intentions, “I am confident you will pardon the liberty taken in thus addressing you, when I tell you of my deep interest in you, and of my pleasure in listening to the great powers of voice which God has given you” and identifies herself, “My father is Gerrit Smith—being his daughter, how can I but hope that your efforts may be crowned with the most brilliant success.” Here, E.S.M. in a way imagines herself as a well-meaning ambassador who seeks to approach Greenfield with the intention of mutually constructing her image to successfully navigate the racist and sexist entertainment industry, and to help Greenfield be taken seriously within the cultural domain of power as a Black woman; however, E.S.M. is condescending. She continues:

I have a few suggestions to make, respecting your dress. You were dressed with great modesty and with much simplicity; still there are some things it would be well for you to lay aside. Wear nothing in your hair, unless it be a cluster of white flowers in the back; never wear coloured (sic) flowers, nor flowing ribbons. Let your dress be a plain black silk, high at the back of the neck, and open in front about halfway to the waist: under this, wear a square of lace, tarltan, or muslin, doubled and laid in folds to cross over the breast. Wear muslin under sleeves, and white kid gloves—always. Dress very loosely. I would advise no whalebones, (but perhaps you are not prepared for that reform.) In case you should lay them aside, a sacque (sic) of the same material as the dress would be very pretty to conceal the figure. If you tire of the black silk, a steel colour would be a good change—but these two are preferable to all others. Your pocket handkerchief should be unfolded and somewhat tumbled, not held by a point in the centre (sic); perhaps it would be better to have it in your pocket, quite out of sight—the piece of music is enough for the hands. I rejoice in the dignity of your deportment and in the good hours you keep. I have said this much in relation to your dress, because I know how important it is that, in the midst of all the prejudice against those of your colour (sic), that your appearance should be strikingly genteel.

E.S.M. provides very similar suggestions to Stowe, to dress simply and modestly; however, E.S.M. takes great liberty by providing with much more information as to the details of

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37 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 11.
38 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, pp. 11-12.
Greenfield’s hair and accessories. This letter also similarly reveals the disciplinary domain of power that Stowe pinpoints, as Greenfield, “dressed with great modest and with much simplicity,” has led E.S.M. to “rejoice in the dignity of” Greenfield’s “deportment.” In this description, E.S.M. reaffirms white assumptions about what black respectability looks like. The biographical narrative never provides Greenfield’s response to E.S.M., but future reviews explains how she does present herself respectably. In wearing this dress, she asserts herself as dignified and on equal footing with her white counterparts who wore similar costumes. Greenfield’s quoted response to Stowe is a touchstone to the complex context in which Greenfield fashioned herself; however, the question of how much control Greenfield had over her image remains.

An ambrotype of Greenfield taken in Buffalo, New York, not included in Young’s biographical sketch, from a year later in 1856, provides another way to perceive Greenfield communicating her material conditions during the nineteenth century. In the ambrotype, Greenfield sits with her hair braided into an elaborate style on a decorative chair, dressed in an elegant dress made of what seems like “black moire antique silk” with lace details. She wears a bracelet and holds what seems to be a pocket watch as she leans on a decorative piece of cloth.

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39 My work is inspired by Judith Pascoe’s *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice* (University of Michigan Press, 2011) which offers a useful paradigm for considering remnants of actress Sarah Siddons’s (1755-1831) voice without recordings. Pascoe describes that “I had so far been using pictures as my chief means of accessing Siddons’s performances” (pp. 13-4), specifically paintings.

This image provides further context of the domains of power Greenfield navigated. In dressing respectably, Greenfield engages with domains of power by countering the stereotypes that blackface minstrelsy was perpetuating at the time, as well as the anxieties around women on the stage being morally corrupted. Greenfield wears a tight-fitting, corseted dress in contrast to Stowe and E.S.M.’s encouragement to dress modestly. She doesn’t wear gloves in this picture, nor does she hold a piece of sheet music or handkerchief, all while staring directly at her viewer.

In 1856, Greenfield had arrived back in the United States from London, hailing further cultivation and solidifying her position as a talented singer-celebrity.

Douglass-Chin’s and Peterson’s analyses of Truth’s carte-de-visite, taken in the 1864 and sold to financially support her speaking tours, provides another way to read Greenfield’s ambrotype. Douglass-Chin, on Truth’s carte-de-visite published with her Narrative, pushes us as the seer, or reader, to consider our own subject position: “In examining her daguerreotype, the reader becomes the object examined as Truth returns an unwavering stare.”

Similarly,

41 Frederick Scott Archer invented the ambrotype, first used widely in the 1850s as a cheaper alternative to the first photographic daguerreotype process, in addition to the popularity of photo
Greenfield exhibits an unwavering stare here that meets the viewer’s eye and forces the viewer to make sense of their subject position and the prejudices and assumptions that they hold. Peterson explains that “The dozen or so photographs that we possess of Truth take pains to emphasize her femininity; indeed, several depict Truth knitting or present her against a background of feminizing elements taken from a domestic interior: a vase of flowers, a cloth-covered table, a mantelpiece, a carpet.”

Does Greenfield “take pains to emphasize her femininity”? This image seems to emphasize her femininity and humanity to resist the cultural domain of power that circulated disparaging representations of Black people in antebellum America. Just as Peterson’s analysis of Sojourner Truth’s photographs reveal that “Truth appears not as a child of Nature but as a historical being who inhabits the realm of Culture, thus returning us to a consideration of the cultural form and content of photography,” we can understand Greenfield pushing against white assumptions and representations of Black people as “children of Nature.” Posing for a portrait that shows Greenfield not participating in any form of labor with nothing in her hands, Greenfield positions herself as a “historical being who inhabits the realm of Culture.” Reading this ambrotype as a means of self-fashioning with agency as both accepting and rejecting aspects of Stowe’s and E.S.M.’s suggestions becomes a testimony to Greenfield’s experience as a black woman performer navigating complex systems of oppression based on white people’s whims in antebellum America.

42 Peterson, Doers of the Word, pp. 41-2.
43 Peterson, Doers of the Word, p. 41.
44 Douglass-Chin analyzes the line “I sell the shadow to support the substance” that appears at the bottom of Truth’s daguerreotypes as evidence of “Her obeisance to the dictates of the cult of true womanhood (woman seated in her proper sphere by the fireplace) seems to take precedence for Truth in matters of saleswomanship. Truth actively peddles her self as commodity in a
Although Greenfield’s ambrotype predates Truth’s carte-de-visite for self-promotion, Peterson’s idea that photographs “came to function for Truth as a form of autobiography, of recorded testimony, of a signature both singular and reproducible”⁴⁵ allows us to understand Greenfield’s image as a testimony which signifies what Collins and Bilge pinpoint as structural and disciplinary domains of power. Douglass-Chin identifies an issue regarding black women’s bodies in nineteenth-century America that cut across structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal domains of power: reading analyses of Jamaican women’s representation in European fairy tales, Douglass-Chin explains how if “the black ‘Prince Charming’ can sense his female counterpart, but when he looks for her he can see ‘no/body’,” he concludes that “To white (and black male) minds across the African diaspora, black females may indeed be ‘no/body’.”⁴⁶ Therefore, “in the nineteenth century, if she is no/body,”

the black woman is also all body, in the sense that she represents the epitome of that which is uncivilized, animal, grossly indelicate, unworthy of artistic representation in any other capacity than obeisant (and very often sexualized) servant…Thus, the black woman becomes no/body who, if she is found at all in the pages of polite texts, or in the display rooms of exhibitions of the fine arts, is bereft of the privilege of dignified personhood. Indeed, black women fought an objectifying embodiment in which they were degraded and often hypersexualized.⁴⁷

The ambrotype can be read to counter the ways in which Young’s biographical sketch makes Greenfield ‘no/body’ by erasing her voice by focusing on disparaging her image. Just as Douglass-Chin analyzes “how nineteenth-century black female evangelists strove to become ‘some/body’ in the face of an erasure so profound that it simultaneously embodied and disembodied them in a discourse of contradiction that is common when white people conceive of

manner that is both a signification upon and an undermining of the commodification of black bodies by the slave trade” (p. 65).

⁴⁶ Douglass-Chin, p. 58.
⁴⁷ Douglass-Chin, p. 59.
black women,” so can we consider the complex ways in which Greenfield became ‘some/body’ in the face of disparagement and erasure from white people on systemic and interpersonal levels. Greenfield presents herself as a middle-class genteel woman sitting in an opulent chair, in evening attire, wearing jewels and lace, with a carefully prepared hairstyle. This image is yet another way to begin to expand the archival frame Young’s biography puts forth illuminates how Greenfield manifests herself as “some/body.”

Returning to the archival materials Young’s biography compiles, and exploring questions of how to perceive Greenfield’s voice through the layers of others representing her within power systems will further illuminate Greenfield’s strategic and persistent navigation of systems of oppression. Yet, Greenfield also participated in many social, financial, and legal transactions that Young’s biography doesn’t include. What does the archive exclude, and what can those absences tell us about how institutional oppression worked, and arguably still works, not only for Greenfield but also for her many successors? If we attend to archival materials with an intersectional lens, doing the work of keeping Black women as the focal point even when they become silenced and invisible within texts representing them, we can begin to answer these pressing questions.

**Singing Resistance: An Intersectional Reading of Greenfield’s Song Lyrics**

Building upon Greenfield’s complex performance context by exploring her response to Stowe through an intersectional lens, this section analyzes how the lyrics Greenfield sang articulate idealized domestic life and assert her subjectivity as an African-American woman within an entertainment industry and nation that systemically enforced her dehumanization.

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48 There is no known evidence of how Greenfield used this photo publicly, like Truth’s carte-de-visite photos. There is no known evidence that she used them for promotional purposes.
Towards the end, for the first time, Young’s biography includes a performance program and song lyrics from Greenfield’s “second grand concert at the Queen’s Concert Rooms, Hanover Square,” that took place after her first grand concert on Tuesday May 31, 1853; reading these lyrics intersectionally in the context in which Greenfield performed them, as a Black woman who was previously enslaved in antebellum America, reveals the systems of power that she navigated. The program includes lyrics to “The Cradle Song” by Wallace and “The Vision of the Negro Slave” (no specified author), “A Fireside Song, -- (by desire)” by Wallace and “Song--, (by desire) ‘When stars are in the quiet sky,” and “Home, Sweet Home.” The song lyrics Greenfield sang are touchstones that show how she participated in and resisted popular cultural representations of Black performers.

The first song lyrics that Young’s biography includes are for “The Cradle Song,” with words by Alfred Tennyson and music by William Vincent Wallace; these lyrics, which represent a lullaby for a baby, show how Greenfield shaped her subjectivity as a Black woman in the United States during the antebellum period. The song’s musical score includes notations to sing “dolce,” sweetly, and at a volume of “piano,” softly:

THE CRADLE SONG—WALLACE.
MISS GREENFIELD.

Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,

49 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 47.
50 Greenfield’s performance follows the performance of a “Peace and War” overture, as well as two songs, “I Arise from Dreams of Thee,” written by Alfred Mellon and performed by Miss Ursula Barclay, and “Adelaide,” written by Ludwig van Beethoven and performed by Signor Gardoni.
51 Young’s biography does not include music scores; however, the Library of Congress does have a copy of “The Cradle Song” (“Images of Cradle Song (1851)” Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/sm1851.670380.0/?sp=1. Accessed 1 Mar. 2019).
Over the rolling waters go,
Come from the drooping moon—
And blow him again to me
While my little one sleeps.
Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,

Father will come to thee soon—
Rest, rest on mother’s breast,
Father will come to thee soon—
Father will come to the babe in his nest.
Silver sails all out of the west,
Under the moon, the silver moon:
Sleep, my little one—
Sleep, my pretty one, sleep.⁵²

This song is a soothing lullaby that expresses love for a child and yearning for a father, which is strikingly different from the original text of the poem.⁵³ While Tennyson’s original poem reflects on children growing up and wanting to leave home, the version that Greenfield sings focuses on the loss of a father figure and hope that he will return to his family. Greenfield’s identity as a

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⁵² *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, pp. 51-2.
⁵³ The original text of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem “Cradle Song” includes:

What does little birdie say
In her nest at peep of day?
Let me fly, says little birdie,
Mother, let me fly away.
Birdie, rest a little longer,
Till thy little wings are stronger.
So she rests a little longer,
Then she flies away.

What does little baby say,
In her bed at peep of day?
Baby says, like little birdie,
Let me rise and fly away.
Baby, sleep a little longer,
Till thy little limbs are stronger.
If she sleeps a little longer,
previously enslaved black woman in antebellum America reminds us that the seemingly innocent lyrics of this song describe a family structure that chattel slavery legally denied millions of black women; the lyrics “Father will come to thee soon” remind audiences of Greenfield’s reality as a previously enslaved black woman in antebellum America: familial separation in which parents were sold to different plantations was very common in the chattel slavery system. Moreover, Greenfield, as a previously enslaved black woman in antebellum America singing references to the “sea” and “rolling waters” reminds listeners of the historical context of the transatlantic slave trade that tore families apart.

Peterson’s readings of nineteenth-century African-American women writers remind us not to “make assumptions about the primacy of the nuclear family nor of women as wives and mothers” since many of these women “followed the ‘anomalous’ pattern of late marriage or early widowhood and consequently bore no, or few, children” and were “thus freed from many of the domestic obligations that burdened most women, black and white.” Greenfield’s biographical information matches this characterization as she did not marry and have children of her own. Peterson’s assertion that although African-American women writers did not have their own nuclear families, they still were “ever aware of the importance of preserving the integrity of black family life and its domestic networks” sheds light on Greenfield’s performance. As Peterson continues to explain, “these black women sought to make of the family a site of cultural resistance;” in performing this song, Greenfield also sought to make the family a site of cultural resistance. Even though Greenfield similarly never married nor had children, the lyrics she sang

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54 Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word*, p. 15.
55 Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word*, p. 15.
focused on family and domestic life; her performance of this song sets her on equal footing with her white women counterparts, as well as reminds audiences of a past and present where exploitation of Black people is still legal.

Karpf’s analysis of nineteenth-century Black women performers sheds additional light on Greenfield’s positionality and how it influences her approach to the “The Cradle Song” lyrics. In analyzing Black women’s performances of *Esther* specifically, Karpf asserts that “the audience’s familiarity with the Esther text” engendered “an assumption that virtually ensured the desired reception of her message and also facilitated audience interaction with her performances.” This collaborative performance, combining audience and performer led to what Peterson describes as “a type of highly cultured ‘voice merging’ that rejected individual ownership of words and semantics and instead derived its authority and credibility from previous orators of the Persian queen’s message, particularly Stewart and Truth.”

Karpf concludes that, “Thus, any musical text, black or white, could be transformed into a black musical response to white music of the nineteenth century that reversed the usual power relations, turning white texts black with the application of African-American rhetorical strategies to European forms.”

Karpf’s reading of Black women’s performances of *Esther* as a “black musical response to white music of the nineteenth century” provides a viable means of reading Greenfield’s performance of Tennyson’s words as “reversing the usual power relations” and pushing against the structural and cultural domains of power that left her vulnerable as a black woman navigating the racist and sexist entertainment institution. The lyrics Greenfield sang based on her identity and context, although

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57 Karpf, Juanita. “‘As with Words of Fire’”, p. 615.
the lyrics and music were written by white British men, challenged the legal system that sought to keep black families separated and oppressed.

The program indicates that Greenfield’s second performance in the program explicitly reminds listeners of the racist antebellum context that she hails from.⁵⁸ We can read Greenfield’s performance order as evidence of Greenfield strategically couching this performance between songs that focused on less historically-specific topics such as familial connection. “The Vision of the Negro Slave,” ⁵⁹ a reanimation of Tom’s final vision in Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, articulates an individual’s pain and hope in the face of racist legal and financial institutions. There is no composer or author associated with this performance in the program, and therefore no associated sheet music to provide how Greenfield would have sung this song; however, the lyrics exhibit feelings that exude pain, sorrow, and hope that communicate her subjectivity:

**SONG. — “THE VISION OF THE NEGRO SLAVE.”**

**MISS GREENFIELD**

Tortured to death by lash-inflicted wound;
His head bowed down, and sunk upon the ground;
Sad was his soul, oppresse’d by heavy care.
Far, far from his home, his heart—deep, dark despair:
When lo! A vision broke before his sight,
A vision holy, beautiful, and bright;

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⁵⁸ Her second performance is listed after five performances by other vocalists.
⁵⁹ I cannot confirm whose song this was. There is a reference to this title as a “lithograph” by C.A. Macfarren (who I can also find no further information about) in *Eliza Cook’s Journal*: “The Vision of the Negro Slave,” by C.A. Macfarren, is not to our taste. We like sacred subjects to be treated with poetic and masterly simplicity, for of all subjects they are the most difficult to touch; and this composition falls far short of the desired standard. The lithograph is somewhat superfluous and irreverent. We are not fond of seeing Him who taught humility and charity paraded in badly-executed pictures as a lure for the thoughtless money-spender. Uncle Tom’s visions would have been better realized if left to the imagination, without this touch of “red fire” and accompanying “brown jug,” which is quite as suggestive of “mile ale” as of the “divine spirit.” *Addison & Hollier, Regent Street.*
The thorn-crown’d brow, with calm pale look resigned
Of one who suffered for mankind.

A voice, more sweet than earthly music’s thrill,
Spake to the captive’s heart—be patient, still.
Behold how meekly mercy’s palm to win
He suffered for thy sake, who had no sin,
As on His Father’s throne by suffering gained,
At length He sitteth, so thy soul, unchained
By patience and long faith, at last shall bound
Into Eternal Life, and be with glory crown’d.  

Through redemptive suffering manifesting in religious discourse, the song’s lyrics emphasize the moderate, delayed move toward liberation with “patience and long faith” for those enslaved so that they will go into “Eternal Life,” “with glory crown’d;” however, the context of the power systems Greenfield navigated make her presence on stage a site of resistance against systems of power that sought to exclude and erase her. The title of this song, “The Vision of the Negro Slave” gives voice to a vision that Tom has in Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin, as the narrator describes: “He began to draw his breath with long, deep inspirations; and his broad chest rose and fell, heavily. The expression of his face was that of a conqueror. ‘Who, -- who, --who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ he said, in a voice that contended with mortal weakness; and, with a smile, he fell asleep.”

By strategically choosing a song connected to Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Greenfield could, to draw upon Glass’s term, “court” her audience, and complexly represent her subjectivity.

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60 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 54.
on a stage that was underpinned with the racist expectations of blackface minstrelsy. In “African American Responses to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” Lois Brown explains that

Nineteenth-century readers of Stowe read that book through the lens of their own experiences of freedom and of bondage, as dedicated and enterprising abolitionists, as laborers and professionals, as survivors of marriages and families forever undone by slavery, as subscribers to and supporters of African American and abolitionist newspapers such as the Rochester, New York-based *North Star* and the legendary Boston *Liberator*.⁶²

Some of these nineteenth-century readers included African-American woman writer Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, who was so deeply influenced by the novel that she published a poetic tribute “To Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe” in the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* (3 February 1854) and William Wells Brown, who wrote a positively shining review to William Lloyd Garrison that Garrison published in the *Liberator* and *Frederick Douglass Paper* (10 June 1853). Brown further explains that “the escaped fugitives Ellen and William Craft” sat with William Wells Brown, as well as “British aristocrats like the Early (sic) of Shaftesbury and Her Grace, the Duchess of Sutherland amid the five thousand who assembled there to greet Stowe.” These figures also became patrons of Greenfield’s during her time in London. Strategically choosing to sing these lyrics again evidences Greenfield’s work of “courting communities” to empower herself.

which signals that the performer is singing a piece that audiences and/or specific patrons wanted to hear. The second part of this grand performance opens with a “Grand Duett (sic) for two Pianofortes” and four other performances before Greenfield performs “A Fireside Song, -- (by desire)” with lyrics by H. F. Chorley and music by William Vincent Wallace. Greenfield sang:

A FIRE-SIDE SONG. —WALLACE.
MISS GREENFIELD.

When the children are asleep,
And the early stars retire,
What a pleasant world comes back
In the toil of day forgot;
And the shadows of the past
How they gather round the fire
With the friends beloved in years,
When the fear of death was not

Then we see the haw thorn hedge
Newly silvered o’er by May,
And the ash tree lithe and tall,
Where the mavis loved to sing;
And the orchard on the slope,
With its rosy apples gay;
And the elder dark with fruit
That was mirrored in the spring,
When the children are asleep.

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63 Infinite thanks to Kathryn Lowerre for pointing me to volumes of *The London Stage, 1660-1800* from c. 1705 show that “by desire” or “by request” meant that an audience or patron suggested the performance. Scholars have noted that using this phrase in the program could also serve as a method of self-promotion, since, as in this case, the requesters are not specified. Candace Bailey and Ralph Locke have published on nineteenth-century American women making music and nineteenth- and twentieth century women patrons and concerts in the United States, respectively. I plan to read Claudia Tate, "Allegories of Black Female Desire; or Rereading Nineteenth-Century Sentimental Narratives of Black Female Authority," in Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women, ed. Cheryl A. Wall, 106-7, next to the British texts to think about Greenfield as a Black woman performer drawing on this tradition.

Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

And the angels of our youth,
That so long in death are cold,
They are calling us again
With their voices mild and low,
Till our minds refuse to dwell
By the coffin in the mould,
And arise with them to heaven,
Where in glory they are now—
And arise with them to heaven.

Then with thoughts at rest at eve,
Be so ever hard the day,
On our spirits cometh down,
A contentment calm and deep,
A better than the joys
Of the noisy and the gay,
Is our quiet hour of dreams,
When the children are asleep.65

Like “The Cradle Song,” this song summons the image of sleeping children, and reminds British listeners both of a past nostalgic time, as well as of the realities of chattel slavery that Greenfield escaped and that other enslaved black people in America still endured. There is a simultaneous sense of sorrow and hope in the songs Greenfield performs. In performing a song reminisces on carefree youth, Greenfield stages her identity as a freed black woman, previously enslaved in the United States within a system that legally controls bodies and decides whether they lived or died. Music became a means of resistance to the oppressive institutions that dehumanized enslaved people; this song articulates desires that enslaved people could temporarily achieve through music and connection with family.

Greenfield’s final performance powerfully articulates desires that enslaved people experienced in resistance to the oppressive institution of chattel slavery. After three other performances, Greenfield performs the penultimate song of the program, “Song--,” (by desire)

65 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 58.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

‘When stars are in the quiet sky,” with lyrics from Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s poem “When Stars Are in the Quiet Skies.” It was usual for patrons of white women performers to request songs; these song requests were honored in the program through being identified as “by desire.” The “by desire” notations for Greenfield show that she is on equal footing with white women performers since white women performers also performed songs “by desire” for patrons who could request songs to sing. The program notes that she is “accompanied by herself on the pianoforte.”

Greenfield sang:

**SONG. — “WHEN STARS ARE IN THE QUIET SKY.”**

**MISS GREENFIELD.**

When stars are in the quiet skies,
Then must I pine for thee,
Bend on me, then, thy tender eyes,
As stars look on the sea,
For thoughts like waves that glide by night
Are stillest when they shine;
Bend on me, then thy tender eyes,
As stars look on the seas.”

There is an hour, when angels keep
Familiar watch o’er men,
When scores of souls are wrapt in sleep;
Sweet spirit, meet me then.
There is an hour when holy dreams,
Whose fairest spirit glide, (through slumber fairest glide)
And in that mystic hour it seems,
Thou should’st be by my side.

The lyrics Greenfield sang differ from the original version of the poem; these differences illuminate how Greenfield communicates to her audiences and mutually constructs power on a

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66 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, pp. 48-9.
67 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 60.
68 Greenfield sings a version that cuts this section from the original poem:
My thoughts of thee too sacred are
For daylight’s common beam:
stage underpinned with racism and sexism. For instance, the original two lines at the end of the first stanza are “Mine earthly love lies hushed in light/ beneath the heaven of thine” which Greenfield changes to “Bend on me, then thy tender eyes/ As stars look on the seas.”

Greenfield’s version calls for the “spirit” to look upon her, while the original version describes the persona looking upon their lover. Within her sociopolitical context as an African-American woman singing these lyrics on the stage while accompanying herself, Greenfield mutually constructs power by guiding the audience’s eyes to look upon her “as stars look upon the sea.” Stars can obviously not gaze; however, Greenfield temporarily disarms the objectifying gaze of the audience influenced by blackface minstrelsy by communicating a desire to be looked upon “as stars look upon the sea.” While my analysis reads Greenfield’s audience as one point of reference to view her, the subject of her song, the “spirit,” also allows Greenfield to articulate her material conditions that do not include an “earthly love.” As such, she communicates complex desire in a social context that seeks to suppress Black women’s subjectivities.

While the concert program documents Greenfield’s voice through the lyrics she sang and reviews that described her voice, the program still elides Greenfield’s voice. Even though the program indicates that Miss Stabbach sang “Home, Sweet Home,” the London Advertiser explains that Greenfield “was encored in two, ‘The Cradle Song,’ a simple melody by Wallace, and ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ which she gave an exceedingly pleasing manner.”69 Was the program

I can but know thee as my star,
My angel and my dream;
When stars are in the quiet skies,
Then most I pine for thee;
Bend on me then then thy tender eyes,

69 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 50.
incorrect, or did the London Advertiser writer mistake Miss Stabbach for Miss Greenfield? Chybowski’s research confirms that this song was part of Greenfield’s regular concert tour repertoire until 1853; therefore, closer consideration of these lyrics allows us to further access Greenfield’s singing voice. The song reflects on a home whose characteristics manifest through bodily response communicated through Greenfield’s voice:

BALLAD. — “SWEET HOME.” -- WRIGHTON. MISS STABBACH.

The dearest spot on earth to me
Is home, sweet home;
The fairy land I long to see
Is home, sweet home.

There how charm’d the sense of hearing,
There where love is so endearing,
All the world is not so cheering
As home, sweet home.

I’ve taught my heart the way to prize
My home, sweet home;
I’ve learned to look with lover’s eyes
On home, sweet home.

There where vows are truly plighted,
There where hearts are so united,
All the world besides I’ve slighted,
For home, sweet home. 70

For a previously enslaved woman, “home, sweet home” is complicated. In singing lyrics which describe corporeal understandings of home where “hearing” and feelings of “endearing” manifest, Greenfield strategically calls attention to her Black body and communicates feeling from her perspective. She shapes a complex subjectivity that “taught [her] heart the way to prize”

70 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 57.
and “learned to look with lover’s eyes” at a home of the United States that she inhabits as a Black woman during the antebellum period.

Just as “The Cradle Song” references the “sea” and “rolling waters,” “Home, Sweet Home” reminds listeners of the transatlantic slave trade that tore families from their original home and forced them through the “Door of No Return.” Greenfield moved from the south to the north with her mistress; by this time, Greenfield’s mistress has died. Where is Greenfield’s “home, sweet home”? Is it with her friends in Buffalo? Is it in Britain amongst her supporters including Stowe? Is Greenfield singing of an imagined home where she doesn’t experience the systemic oppression that she faced in the United States and Britain? While Greenfield hasn’t written these lyrics, her choosing to sing them as part of her repertoire allows her to communicate yearnings and vulnerabilities within a context underpinned with racism and sexism.

To think about Greenfield’s musical program in its entirety as a strategic way to communicate her subjectivity, I draw upon Debra J. Rosenthal’s “Deracialized Discourse.” Specifically, Rosenthal offers another way to think about the other songs on Greenfield’s program that do not as explicitly address race, such as “Vision of the Negro Slave.” Most obviously, the actual lyrics to many of the songs Greenfield sang were written by white men. By analyzing the racial ambiguity in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s “The Two Offers” and Sowing and Reaping, Rosenthal proposes that readers could focus on the moral issue at hand, temperance, rather than characters’ race, and “defy easy stereotyping” that black writers and
performers were resisting.\textsuperscript{71} Since Harper’s stories appeared in black publications with black readership, “Harper’s deracialized discourse appropriates and politicizes the raceless conventions of white-authored novels.”\textsuperscript{72} Similarly, in singing songs by white men composers, Greenfield’s song choices can be read as appropriating and politicizing “the raceless conventions of white-authored” songs. Rosenthal amplifies Harper’s own voice in choosing to make race ambiguous in these texts as Harper argued that black artists’ “talents are to be recognized we must write less of issues that are particular and more of feelings that are general.”\textsuperscript{73} This belief provides an interesting commentary to the songs Greenfield sang, as these songs address “feelings that are general” including familial ties, affection, and mourning over the past. Greenfield’s performance of these “feelings that are general” similarly articulates Harper’s intention to represent “characters who could be black lead lives indistinguishable from those of white Americans, indicates that middle-class respectability is a right in itself.”\textsuperscript{74} Through these supposedly “raceless” songs that articulate nuances of “raceless” private life, Greenfield asserts that desire, vulnerability, and pain are not raceless, and in fact are shaped by one’s sociopolitical context. “Raceless” is never really a condition, but a signifier of insidious whiteness. Through her musical program, Greenfield communicates hers and Black women’s humanity into institutions that systemically sought to oppress and silence them. While her performance of songs was one way to assert her presence as a black woman in antebellum America, Greenfield’s managerial contract further illuminates the context in which she arrived on the stage.

\textsuperscript{72} Rosenthal, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{73} Rosenthal, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{74} Rosenthal, p. 156.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

**Negotiating Exploitation: An Intersectional Reading of Greenfield’s Performance Contract**

So far, I have examined Greenfield’s complex speaking and performance context as the first prominent black woman performer in antebellum America. By analyzing Greenfield’s spoken response to Stowe and the song lyrics that she sang through Collins and Bilge’s methodology of using intersectionality as an analytical tool, we’ve seen the complicated lines that Greenfield navigated as a black woman performer entering a capitalist economy that systemically reinforces racism and sexism. To highlight another layer of understanding the sociocultural contexts in which she performed through an intersectional framework, we can closely read Greenfield’s performance contract that Young’s biography includes, which makes Greenfield’s navigation of the legal and financial systems in the United States visible in a way that contemporary scholarship has yet to deeply explore. The unidentified narrator of Young’s biography explains that after white patrons discovered Greenfield on a steamship “while crossing Lake Seneca, en route to Buffalo,” the Buffalo Musical Association proclaimed, “Give the ‘Black Swan,’ said they, the cultivation and experience of the fair Swede, or Md’lle Parodi, and she will rank favourably (sic) with those popular singers, who have carried the nation into captivity by their rare musical abilities.”

This “fair Swede” the Buffalo Musical Association alludes to is Jenny Lind, who audiences referred to as the “Swedish Nightingale.”

While Greenfield was less well-known than Lind, audiences compared them relentlessly; even though the “Black Swan” label signified equality of talent between Greenfield and Lind, the legal and financial context was not. An intersectional reading of Greenfield’s contract in Young’s biography compared to Lind’s contract in P.T. Barnum’s memoir *The Life of P.T.*

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75 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 5.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

*Barnum* (1854) illuminates the differing contexts in which Greenfield and Lind negotiated.76 Within Collins and Bilge’s intersectional framework, intentional contextualization is imperative to show how “social inequality” manifests “based on interactions among various categories.”77 The negotiating letters leading up to Greenfield’s contract in Young’s biography make her role in negotiating opaque at best, which we can be read because of her status as a formerly enslaved Black woman living in antebellum America. By contrast, Lind’s context, as a white woman from Sweden with an established singing career, played a key role in her contract negotiations with P.T. Barnum.

A genuinely intersectional approach to Greenfield’s archival materials reveals her legal and financial negotiations within the entertainment industry that are drastically different from Lind’s, but how? While Greenfield’s voice doesn’t directly appear in the negotiating letters and the contract itself, these documents illuminate the complex contexts in which Greenfield’s singing voice manifested. As Chybowski notes, by way of the archival materials Young’s biography includes, during the beginning of her performance career in 1853, Greenfield also *made plans* to further her music profession. She received and *considered offers* for another tour of the United States, concerts in New York City, and a potential tour of Europe (footnote 97). On February 16, 1853, she, along with her Buffalo patrons


including Hiram E. Howard and Buffalo Mayor Eli Cook, *finalized plans* for an English Tour (footnote 98). (italics mine)

Chybowski provides a contemporary understanding of a nineteenth-century woman performer who “made plans,” “considered offers,” and “finalized plans;” however, a closer consideration of the negotiating letters and contract that shape this characterization clarify what making and finalizing plans, as well as considering offers looked like to a Black woman in antebellum America.

Alternatively, Barnum’s memoir reveals what making and finalizing plans, as well as considering offers looked like for Lind, already a famous singer in Europe whom he brought to the United States in September 1850, five years before Young published Greenfield’s biographical sketch. Leading up to Barnum’s contract with Lind, he explains that he had Mr. John Hall Wilton, “an Englishman who had visited this country with the Sax-Hom Players, the best man whom I knew for that purpose,” contact Lind to begin negotiations. Wilton reached out directly to Lind, and she responded that she had four other offers to consider. Lind met with Mr. Wilton and, according to Barnum, “frankly told him that during the time occupied by their correspondence, she had written to friends in London... and had informed herself respecting my [Barnum’s] character, capacity, and responsibility, which she assured him were quite satisfactory.” Lind informed Wilton that she wanted particular performers to accompany her, specifically Julius Benedict and Giovanni Belletti, and, following that stipulation, “Several

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80 Barnum, p. 99.
interviews ensued, during which she learned from Wilton that he had settled with Messrs. Benedict and Belletti, in regard to the amount of their salaries, provided the engagement was concluded, and in the course of a week, Mr. Avilton and Miss Lind had arranged the terms and conditions on which she was ready to conclude the negotiations.  

Barnum’s characterization of Lind’s agreement very much shows Lind’s active presence that fits Chybowski’s characterization of nineteenth-century women performers who “made plans,” “considered offers,” and “finalized plans.”

However, Greenfield’s negotiating letters and contract show that her role in negotiating was contextually more complex, and illustrative of what Collins and Bilge refer to as “social inequality based on interactions among various categories.” The various categories in Greenfield’s context include her race, gender, and class status in antebellum America as compared to Lind. Chybowski writes that “She received and considered offers,” yet Young’s biography only includes one offer. While space is limited in Young’s text, including just one offer represents Greenfield’s position as one with less considerations than she perhaps had, and continues to represent her as a Black woman who succeeds at the mercy of well-meaning white people. Directly before the copy of Greenfield’s first managerial contract Young’s biography includes, there is a letter from E.T.N., addressed from Cleveland on December 16, 1852. This first letter is addressed to Greenfield herself: “MISS GREENFIELD: -- Dear Madam, -- I take the liberty to address a few lines to you on the subject of giving concerts.” The potential manager follows this greeting by proving his authority to manage Greenfield through relations to

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81 Barnum, p. 101.
84 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 35.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

others including Jenny Lind, P.T. Barnum, Major Dunn, Col. Wood, and “slightly with Mr. Ladd, formerly of your troupe.” As Barnum’s characterization of Lind’s negotiation from 1850 similarly shows, for a woman performer, it was customary for the performer, or whomever was helping the performer, to do due diligence before entering negotiations. In Greenfield’s case, E.T.N. leverages what George Yancy defines as “a synergistic system of transversal relationships” that constitutes “the power of whiteness.” Taking advantage of his power as a white man in relation to other white patrons, E.T.N. asserts his authority, and is successful.

After this first letter when the prospective manager E.T.N. reaches out to Greenfield directly, the next letter shows that E.T.N. writes to Mr. Howard to help with the negotiation of her contract. The letter begins “MR. HOWARD: -- Dear Sir, -- If Miss Greenfield would accept an engagement for three months, to travel in the interior of this, and adjoining states, I should like to give it a trial” Greenfield’s response to Howard, and in turn to E.T.N., remains tacit in the biography’s inclusion of these two letters, since the negotiation is subsequently conducted between these two men without further input (at least to our knowledge) from Greenfield. The exchange between Howard and E.T.N. represents a microcosm of power mediated by whiteness that mutes black women’s voices, even when they are the putative subject of the discussion.

After explaining his specific tour plans, E.T.N. continues: “Please consult with Miss Greenfield, and let me know her mind. If she accepts, every thing (sic) will be done to make it pleasant for her.” While E.T.N. articulates care for Greenfield and situates her as part of the negotiating relationship, E.T.N. explains to Howard: “I will come to Buffalo and settle preliminaries on

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85 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 35.
87 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 35.
88 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 35.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

hearing from you. I have letters of recommendation from Mr. Barnum, which I do not deem necessary to send you, as you saw Mr. Barnum in New York so recently. Truly yours, E.T.N.”

This letter, compared to Lind’s correspondence with Barnum, reveals Greenfield’s agency shifting to her white, well-meaning friend. Within what Collins and Bilge refer to as the “structural domain of power,” Greenfield does not wield agency to negotiate on her own as a Black woman. In her own way, Greenfield wielded agency by leveraging “a synergistic system of transversal relationships” that constitutes “the power of whiteness,” which for Greenfield manifests through her friend Howard; however, we eventually learn that this strategy didn’t prove successful for Greenfield as E.T.N. abandoned her in England.

Moreover, it is difficult to see how “power relations” manifest “through lens of mutual construction” because these letters do not explicitly document Greenfield’s negotiating role. Greenfield’s voice in this negotiation between Howard, E.T.N. and herself is erased; her response to E.T.N. manifests only in a letter that the manager addresses to Howard. While Chybowski characterizes these exchanges as ones in which Greenfield plays an active role—making and finalizing plans, as well as considering offers—closer analysis of the two letters shows the complex power dynamics at play and, in a way, shows how Greenfield was erased within the financial and legal institutions she negotiated within.

Following the two negotiation letters, Greenfield’s contract evidences continued exploitation at the hands of well-meaning white northerners. Engaging with Collins’s and Bilge’s “both/and relational thinking,” Greenfield’s contractual negotiations represent both oppression

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89 *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, p. 35.
90 Collins, *Intersectionality*, p. 27.
and resistance. Specifically, Lind’s skin privilege gives her agency to leverage her position as a woman in a performance sector that perpetuated sexism, while Greenfield must rely upon a white man to ensure that she can access the negotiation process and be taken seriously. Howard, supposedly looking out for the best interests of Greenfield as the letters suggest, would have assisted her in negotiating for the best deal. Nonetheless, the contract, which is fully reproduced in Young’s biography, reveals that Greenfield was still exploited within the racist and sexist capitalist system she was navigating, regardless of Howard’s best intentions.

Taking a closer look at Greenfield’s contract with Collins and Bilge’s intersectional framework in mind creates a more nuanced historical representation of the “Black Swan.” For example, one stipulation describes that “No agents are to be employed in the said business except such as shall be specially attached to the troupe, and such as shall be necessary to promote the objects of the enterprise.” Here, “objects of the enterprise,” does not clearly signify. It could be read as the objectives of the tour, but it could also refer to the performer herself. This phrase becomes even more alarming when we read Greenfield’s contract alongside Lind’s with Barnum, as Lind is always referred to by name. The structural and cultural domains of power are striking. As in the antebellum period when chattel slavery was law, and white slavers justified selling Black people through objectification, this statement indicates the manager’s exploitation of Greenfield.

Closer examination through an intersectional lens likewise reveals the structural and cultural domains of power that shape Greenfield’s contract’s exploitative conditions:

The party of the second part is to have the privilege of selecting her own maid, whose services and expenses are to be paid out of the moneys received from such concerts, such wages not exceeding six dollars a month, in case she shall select her own maid. All the expenses incurred in the said business, including the furnishing of such

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93 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 36.
wardrobes as shall be mutually agreed upon—the individual expenses of both the parties—the musical instruction of the part of the second part, and the expenses of the part of the second part back to New York, are to be paid out of the receipts of such concerts, and the overplus (sic) is to be divided between the parties as follows: to the part of the first part four fifths: to the part of the second part one fifth. The amount which shall at any time be due to the part of the second part for her share in the profits shall be paid to her on demand.  

The division of profit, four-fifths to her manager, one-fifth to Greenfield, reflects compensation that allows her to sustain herself so long as she performs; however, that division of profit does not allow for Greenfield’s long-term sustainability. Moreover, the document repeatedly emphasizes that the contract is certified so long as Greenfield’s health allows her to perform to contractual obligations, which appears to be well-meaning; however, there’s no reflection of any protections for Greenfield if she’s unable to perform and fulfill the obligations the contract spells out. White exploitation of Black bodies in entertainment institutions sanctioned within managerial contracts is a tradition that endures. This contract is one potential origin where Greenfield and her white manager “finalized plans,” and institutionally-sanctioned exploitation began.

While Young’s biography begins with Greenfield travelling to Buffalo, an agent of her own success, the managerial contract foreshadows Greenfield’s disenfranchisement when she travels to Europe to tour. The contract explains:

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94 The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 36-7.
95 Nina Sun Eidsheim (“Marian Anderson and ‘Sonic Blackness’ in American Opera.” Sound Class: Listening to American Studies, special issue of American Quarterly, vol. 63, no. 3, September 2011, pp. 641-71.) reminds us of the reality that “few companies were willing to pay Black artists enough to make a living” (p. 652). Greenfield’s contract shows how that reality manifested and perpetuated. While circumstances have changed, many studies show that Black women are paid less than their counterparts in all sectors (“Black Women in the Labor Force.” Department of Labor, February 2016, https://www.dol.gov/wb/media/Black_Women_in_the_Labor_Force.pdf. Accessed 1 March 2019).
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

In case the party of the first part shall for any reason wish at any time, after they shall arrive in Europe, to dissolve this agreement, he is at liberty to do so upon conditions that he shall pay her the balance that may then be due to her, and shall in addition thereto, pay her a sum of money sufficient to pay the expenses of herself and servant back to the city of New York in a respectable manner.96

The manager can break the contract at any time “for any reason,” making it legally permissible for E.T.N., as Greenfield’s gatekeeper to power within racist institutions, to neglect her with impunity. Technically, E.T.N. abandons Greenfield without her ever having given a performance in Europe once she arrives, and the contract shows that he has no binding obligation to her.

While on the surface the contract, which was negotiated by Greenfield’s well-meaning white friends, appears to protect Greenfield, really, it is a document that has many loopholes, leaving her unprotected as a Black woman performer within white-dominated financial and legal institutions.

Greenfield’s story of becoming a renowned Black woman performer in antebellum America is a remarkable one; yet Greenfield’s contract, providing one fifth of the profits she accumulated, reaffirms her position within a country where chattel slavery, and dehumanization of all Black people, was still sanctioned by law. Virginia Cope’s “‘I Verily Believed Myself to Be a Free Woman’: Harriet Jacobs’s Journey into Capitalism” provides a useful lens to reflect on Greenfield’s contract as an entree into capitalism as a black woman performer in the United States. Cope explains that “nineteenth-century notions of contract” in the north were essential in creating “idealized voluntary market exchanges as the embodiment of human liberty;”97 however, as a Black woman singer in the United States, the language of contract was used for

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97 Cope, Virginia. “‘I Verily Believed Myself to Be a Free Woman’: Harriet Jacobs’s Journey into Capitalism.” *African American Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 5-20, p. 5.
different means. Abolitionists used contractual rhetoric to articulate the exploitation of slaves” while “slaveholders used paternalistic rhetoric to posit slaves as inherently inferior and dependent;” this contract both reveals her exploitation, yet also uses “paternalistic rhetoric” to be seemingly well-meaning yet framing her as inferior to white counterparts like Lind who were more protected and made more financially. The lack of property rights for women during the nineteenth century shape the paternalistic aspects of contracts for women performers on stage regardless of race; however, for Greenfield as an African-American woman, she could not find protection to have these stipulations honored at all, as she knew from her experience with lawyers denying her mistress’s will that bequeathed her money. While considering Greenfield’s contract reveals the structural, disciplinary, and cultural domains of power that she inhabited and navigated, later letters that Young’s biography includes show Greenfield’s persistence. She engages with interpersonal domains of power in a European context (by reaching out to wealthy patrons supposedly with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s assistance) when E.T.N. didn’t follow through on his contractual responsibilities. While Greenfield’s voice is technically silent in her contract, making the complex context she navigated more visible allows contemporary readers to understand the origin of systemic exploitation of Black women within legal, financial, and entertainment institutions that arguably still endures today.

Composing Resistance: An Intersectional Reading of Greenfield’s Letters

To continue re-imagining the archive of information that foregrounds critical reception of Greenfield, I turn to letters signed by Greenfield as another focal point of her voice. While in her musicological work that recovers Greenfield’s history, Chybowski emphasizes nineteenth-

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98 Cope draws on Amy Dru Stanley’s *From Bondage to Contract* (Cambridge UP, 1998) to theorize how contractual language was used in an antebellum context.
century biographers’ limitations of providing a holistic representation of Greenfield’s life, she does cite Young’s biography’s potential to fill in historical gaps in Greenfield’s biography more times than she cites it as perpetuating a disparaging and incomplete narrative. Greenfield’s voice as it manifests in letters, seemingly unfiltered through white reviewers’ perceptions, yet still impacted by systems of power, premiere in the second half of the biography. In a letter taking legal action against her negligent manager, Greenfield writes a letter to cancel their initial contract:

To MR. ---, 29 George Street, Hanover Square, London:

Sir: --- The salary of five pounds per week, payable by you to me under our agreement, bearing date the twenty-first day of October, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-three, being in arrears and unpaid for more than five weeks last past, (though repeated applications have been made to you for payment thereof) and the amount now owing to me by you having been demanded, and default
being made in payment of the same, and there being other breaches on your part, of the agreement made between us, I do hereby, in pursuance of the power or authority given to me by the said agreement, bearing date the twenty-first day of October, eighteen hundred and fifty-three, and of all other powers and authorities enabling me thereto, give you notice that I do hereby cancel the said agreement, bearing date the twenty-first day of October, eighteen hundred and fifty-three, and of all other powers and authorities enabling me thereto, give you notice that I do hereby cancel the said agreement, bearing date as aforesaid, and also the agreement dated the sixteenth day of February, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-three, respectively made between you of the one part and myself of the other part, and do hereby declare that the said agreements, respectively, shall be, and become absolutely void on the giving of this notice to you; but without prejudice to my rights and remedies for the recovery of any money that may now be due to me, under or by virtue of the said agreement, or either of them.

I am, sir, your obedient servant, ELIZABETH T. GREENFIELD.

In her letter, Greenfield shows the exploitation she experienced at the hands of an individual that manipulated the structural domains of power that systemically disenfranchise black women.
Greenfield explains that she was not paid what she was promised by E.T.N. for “more than five weeks” as she was performing. Greenfield uses this document, and the power inherent in its form, to wield “all other powers and authorities” enabling her to cancel the agreement; however, Greenfield signs this letter in a way that emphasizes her disenfranchisement within the power systems she’s navigating since she signs it “your humble servant.” While Greenfield does abide by nineteenth-century letter writing conventions for white women and women of status, this signoff highlights the Greenfield’s realities as a black woman navigating systems of power much differently than white women.\(^{100}\) Richard Douglass-Chin’s emphasizes the reality of “Black women writing in the nineteenth century” who “struggled to be heard on their own terms, but it seems that how and what their writing signified was often dependent on audiences whose narrative economies about the lives of black women differed drastically from the narratives by the women themselves.\(^{101}\) A subject’s identity impacts the way they write a letter, and the identity of the audience impacts the way a letter writer writes; however, when we analyze Greenfield’s identity and position within structural domains of power, we can see how her identity plays a significant role in how she navigates writing this letter. As a black woman, she is more vulnerable in navigating legal institutions than any of her white male counterparts are.

Stowe had already reminded Greenfield of the sociopolitical context in instructing her to keep a receipt to prove that she rightfully owned the dress that she bought her; Peterson provides further evidence of this reality based on her exploration of “Truth, Lee, Stewart, Prince, and Watkins

\(^{100}\) For an example of actresses negotiating contracts through humbling themselves, see Helen E.M. Brooks’s “‘Your sincere friend and humble servant’: Evidence of Managerial Aspirations in Susanna Cibber’s Letters.” *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2008, pp. 147-59.

Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

Harper, for example,” who “entered the national public sphere as workers, principally domestics or seamstresses. In this unprotected public sphere, black women suffered indignities and assaults not experienced by their white counterparts.”¹⁰² In challenging her former manager by communicating her material conditions, including the exploitation and vulnerability she suffered that her managerial contract legitimizd, Greenfield opened herself up to vulnerabilities of being counter-sued, or worse.

Directly following the letter, the narrator emerges again, highlighting the disciplinary domains of power that leave Greenfield vulnerable as a black woman within a racist and sexist entertainment institution. The narrator explains that “The piano forte which previously had been furnished Miss G., to practice upon, was taken from her” and that “The Duchess of Sutherland, upon learning the fact, immediately directed her to select one from Broadwoods.”¹⁰³ Then, Greenfield’s voice manifests in an announcement “made to the British public” in 1854 that she signs:

27 Margaret Street, Cavendish Square.

The Black Swan, in appealing to the generosity of the British public, assures them that the primary object of her visit to Europe is, to accomplish herself in the science of music, which professional friends earnestly counsel her to pursue, and which she embraces *con amore*, with the confident hope that, by the exercise of her vocal faculties in a more cultured form, she may be able to achieve the great object of her life. She is sensible of the philanthropic spirit of the people of Great Britain, and feels confident that they will receive her appeal with that kindness and forbearance that ever characterizes them in the cause of true humanity.

The Black Swan, therefore, has the honour of informing the nobility, gentry, and public, that she will shortly appear at a grand concert (the particulars of which

¹⁰² Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word*, p. 16.
¹⁰³ *The Black Swan at Home and Abroad*, pp. 44-5.
will be announced) under distinguished patronage. ELIZABETH T. GREENFIELD.¹⁰⁴

This letter evidences two layered identities, “The Black Swan” and “ELIZABETH T. GREENFIELD”; this self-framing highlights her artistic strategies of creating and constructing a “Black Swan” persona, while also maintaining her subjectivity as Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield. The announcement refers to Greenfield in the third person as “The Black Swan,” and she also signs the announcement with her full name. Greenfield acknowledges that her material conditions as a singer-celebrity include being identified as “The Black Swan”; however, in this letter she asserts her subjectivity by acknowledging “The Black Swan” agnomen audiences identified her by and signing with her name. Greenfield takes up “The Black Swan” identity that has led to audiences knowing her, yet also continues to assert her individuality by signing her name. This announcement further solidifies the narrative of Greenfield as student that Chybowski condemns nineteenth-century biographers for, yet also announces a “grand concert” that builds her credibility as a performer. This letter comes directly before Greenfield’s performance that Stowe attends and writes a reflection upon, where we began analysis of the only quoted instance of Greenfield’s speaking voice that appears in the biography. Analyzing primary documents in Young’s biography through an intersectional prism illuminates how Greenfield navigated the entertainment industry, expanding the frame beyond the biography further amplifies Greenfield communicating her material conditions.

¹⁰⁴ The Black Swan at Home and Abroad, p. 45.
Conclusion: In Which a Twenty-First Century White Woman Reads a Twentieth-Century Black Woman’s Scholarship on a Nineteenth-Century Black Woman Concert Singer

Studying Greenfield’s life and music troubles assumptions about nineteenth-century Black women’s talent and artistry understood with white women singers as the norm; we can also understand the position of African American women’s diverse resistance strategies more broadly in the nineteenth century. While contemporary scholarship has prominently focused on white audience reception of Greenfield, Georgia A. Ryder, an African-American woman musicologist from the later-twentieth century, also engages with representations of Greenfield’s context, yet is never cited. I conclude this chapter by bringing her writing into an archive of Greenfield to further foster an intersectional reading practice that pinpoints moments of erasure and presence within power systems of knowledge creation and compilation.  

In October 1975, Ryder gave a paper at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History meeting in Atlanta that interrogated a “store of common knowledge” that has historically perpetuated racist, classist, and sexist assumptions linked with performance. Specifically, in her paper “Black Women in Song: Some Socio-Cultural Images,” she identified a “highly significant project report dealing with song style and culture” by the Anthropology Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the “Cantometrics project of Columbia University, directed by ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax and staffed by other distinguished ethnologists, musicologists, linguists, analysts, and researchers” that had not been

105 Ryder (1924-2005) was the first African-American Dean of the School of Arts and Letters, Norfolk State University, a Laureate of Virginia, and a Virginia Wesleyan College trustee.
critically engaged with for nearly a decade. The “common knowledge” that this four-year study perpetuated was that “song style symbolizes and reinforces certain important aspects of social structure in all cultures.” For a discipline largely controlled by white men, including Alan Lomax, inherently underpinned by systems of oppression based on race, class, and gender, the assertion that “song style” as a cultural touchstone “symbolizes and reinforces…aspects of social structure” reinforces white supremacist, sexist, and classist assumptions about white male superiority, and has historically reinforced the justification of oppression and colonization. Ryder disturbs racist ideologies and beliefs that justify cultural and social inequality were deep-seated beliefs of cultural and social inequity that become naturalized when a powerful institution of knowledge says it is so; she provided for her audience a way to resist within institutions by foregrounding the consequences Black women face within institutions that knowingly perpetuate implicit and explicit bias.

While the problematic Cantometrics project asserts that a song’s style signifies whether a society is more “cultivated” or “savage,” closer consideration of any composer or performer throughout history quickly breaks down this project’s logic, as music and performance are inherently palimpsestic, temporal spaces influenced by power dynamics. For example, twentieth-century Hungarian composer Béla Bartók, whose highly-celebrated works were influenced by Czechoslovakian folk music, and twentieth-century American composer George Gershwin, whose works were influenced by African-American jazz music, not only exemplify that music cannot clearly and cleanly signify social structures. These examples also highlight that white men can, within a music industry, draw upon music of those who do not have as great structural

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power (class in Bartók’s case, and race and class in Gershwin’s case) and be applauded within expensive, segregated twentieth-century concert halls.

The combination of popular and classical song isn’t a new phenomenon, as a superficial glance at Greenfield’s concert program which places her on equal footing with her white contemporaries reveals. Musicologist Henry F. Gilbert asserts that “Folk-tunes have made use of in one way or another in art-music for several hundred years.”\textsuperscript{107} However, individuals and systems enacting colonization and oppression use the idea that musical qualities exhibit and reinforce social structures, to justify colonization and oppression. The combination of popular and classical song and performance is especially not a new phenomenon for those who do not wield the same agency within institutions that uphold racism, sexism, and classism.

To intervene in this unchallenged “common knowledge” on the nationally-recognized stage of the ASALH meeting, Ryder spotlighted Black women performers including Harriet Tubman, Ethel Waters, and Bessie Smith to emphasize that

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\text{…in the public consciousness identification may be the prominent element, over-riding the personal or musical attributes of many black singers. This identification is established not only regarding racial characterization but also to song style, life style, or the breaking of barriers. Images are formed that have less to do with the singer’s ability as a singer than with prevailing social attitudes, restrictions or cumberments.}\textsuperscript{108}
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The “identification” Ryder pinpoints here is racial identity which informs white audiences and white critics that write about Black women’s performances. Ryder highlights that audiences’ focus on Black women’s race and how their talent manifests despite being Black, yet, at the same time, the material conditions, “social attitudes, restrictions or cumberments” manifest only


\textsuperscript{108} Ryder, Georgia A. “Black Women in Song: Some Socio-Cultural Images,” p. 602.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

through the perception of white audiences within power systems that uphold white supremacy, sexism, and classism. While Black women singers are visible because their Blackness tied to their talent was novel for white audiences, their experiences and personal lives become invisible within institutions. Patricia Hill Collins’ quote, that “It is more likely for Black women as members of an oppressed group to have critical insights into the condition of our own oppression than it is for those who live outside those structures” provides another way to understand Ryder’s perspective; Ryder calls upon Black women from the past to explain how and why oppression and silencing of the voices of women of color occurs within institutions of power. To understand how oppression operates within the structures of academia and the entertainment industry, in other words, #citeblackwomen.

Ryder’s under-cited musicological work on race, gender, class generally, and on Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield specifically illuminate the challenges that Black women singers historically faced, and arguably continue to face, that expands the existing understandings of Black women singers’ relationship between their body and voice in scholarship and writings on them.109 Published reviews of Greenfield’s performances always compared her to her white women counterparts, and prominently express shock and surprise at her talent because of her racial identity. In other words, Ryder draws upon Greenfield’s experience to show that the Cantometrics project’s assertion is incorrect; in doing so, Ryder exemplifies Collins’s assertion with her “critical insights into the condition of…oppression,”110 specifically in this case entertainment industries throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States.

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109 Pauline E. Hopkins (1859-1930) was a prolific African-American woman writer who created musical plays, serialized novels, newspaper articles and features.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

Resisting the oppressive conclusions of Lomax’s study, Ryder explains the consequences of “public consciousness identification,” which for Greenfield manifested in how racist, sexist, and classist audiences understood, or misunderstood, the relationship between her racial identity and talent.

My project builds on Ryder’s by highlighting “a store of common knowledge” regarding African-American women singer-celebrities by shifting attention from predominantly white audiences and institutions to Black women audiences. Much of the existing publications about Greenfield, both from the antebellum period and into the twenty first century, rely heavily upon white-authored published reviews of her performances. By closely analyzing Greenfield’s letters, song lyrics, photographs, as well as the Black women’s responses to her performances that appear in a diary, letters, and periodicals that reveal more complex representations of her navigation of the entertainment industry as the first prominent Black woman singer in the antebellum period, I not only build upon musicological and historical work which has focused on people and documents created within a system of white supremacy. I also build upon Ryder’s work which seeks to dismantle disparaging self-perpetuating assumptions about Black talent and art. The absence of Greenfield’s voice and perspective in published texts about her highlights Black women’s invisibility in institutions of power. These invisibilities are just as much a part of the visibilities—how Greenfield’s voice and physical presence does manifest in archival materials— that create the “treasured nuggets” that become Greenfield’s historical presence, and are rendered invisible in the service of upholding a racist, sexist, and classist entertainment industry that seeks to uphold her white women singer-celebrity contemporaries.
Chapter 2: Pauline Hopkins & Dianthe Lusk

Though her voice was universally praised, her experiences were not always pleasant.¹

—Darlene Clark Hine

Maligned and misunderstood, the Afro-American woman is falsely judged by other races.²

—Pauline E. Hopkins

As Pauline E. Hopkins stood at the precipice of the twentieth century with the nineteenth century close behind, she crafted serialized fiction and non-fiction texts for Colored American Magazine to challenge the pervasive racism, sexism, and classism plaguing African-Americans. In addition to being a prolific writer, she was also a composer and singer. Biographer Ira Dworkin explains, “While the bulk of Hopkins’s reputation rests on her output during a four-year period when she was in her forties,” before then she had been very involved in musical creation and production. Specifically, in 1879, at twenty years old, she wrote and produced Slaves’ Escape; or, The Underground Railroad (later revised as Peculiar Sam; or, The Underground Railroad). Born in Portland, Maine in 1859 and raised by her parents Benjamin Northup and Sarah Allen in Boston, Massachusetts, throughout the 1880s, she performed as a vocalist with her family ensemble, the Hopkins Colored Troubadours.³ In November 1901, she premiered the

¹ Darlene Clark Hine’s entry on Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield in Black Women in America (1993) reflects on her experience as an African American woman concert singer navigating racist and sexist individuals and systems.
² Pauline E. Hopkins’s introduction to her “Famous Women of the Negro Race” feature in the Colored American Magazine, November 1901 that reflects on the experiences of African American women’s raced, gendered, and classed experiences.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

“Famous Women of the Negro Race” monthly feature, asserting that “[m]aligned and misunderstood, the Afro-American woman is falsely judged by other races.” In addition to Hopkins being a prolific writer, composer, and singer, she was a historian. An archivist of sorts, documenting the successes of Black women singer-celebrities in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hopkins begins the “Famous Women” feature, which documents Black women’s wide-ranging accomplishments, with “Phenomenal Vocalists,” arguing for the political salience of Black women singers who had reached celebrity status in the United States. The premiere installment begins with an entry on Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield. Perhaps influenced by her own experience as a renowned soprano in Boston, Hopkins theorizes Greenfield considering nineteenth-century published critical reviews and bibliographies that articulate well-meaning surprise at Greenfield’s talent at best and explicit, racist disdain at worst. Specifically, Hopkins pinpoints the failure to reconcile her exceptional voice and her Black body within a racist, sexist, and classist entertainment industry: “He [God] sent an angel’s voice to dwell within a casket ebony-bound, with the peculiarly carved features of racial development indelibly stamped upon it, to confound the scepticism (sic) of those who doubted his handiwork.” Hopkins explains how Greenfield’s Black body rendered her figuratively dead, a “casket ebony-bound,” when she arrived on the stage since she had to counter white supremacist stereotypes perpetuated by blackface minstrelsy even before she began to sing.

Lois Brown explains that Hopkins’s description of Greenfield’s body as such “reveals an uncharacteristic weariness on her part” which “succeeds precisely because such images enable

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reclamation of that female body—vulnerable during and after slavery—as a tool for the enlightenment of all those who encountered Greenfield.\(^6\) This description powerfully comments on the past representations of Greenfield, and, in a way, articulates Greenfield’s material conditions in which her body was something that audiences impressed their own assumptions upon while celebrating her voice. Hopkins’ representation explodes the traditional biographical form and writing about Greenfield, and historical figures in general, providing insight into the serialized novel that she would write the following year, *Of One Blood*.

Hopkins’ “Famous Women” importantly documents and celebrates Greenfield in a trajectory of Black women singers. And, from the archival materials that I’ve reviewed, it appears that Hopkins is the only person who wrote about Greenfield at the beginning of the twentieth century. No one had yet theorized Greenfield within her complex performance context as Hopkins had.\(^7\) This chapter continues to re-imagine a more inclusive archive that enriches the historical record by amplifying African-American woman writer Pauline Hopkins’s theorization of Black women singers, expanding the traditional, historical academic frame. Through the interplay of non-fiction with her “Phenomenal Vocalists” feature and fiction with her serialized

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\(^7\) Lawson A. Scruggs (1857-1914), who was born in slavery and worked in construction for the Atlantic and Mississippi Railroad and the Western Union Telegraph company, and Monroe Alpheus Majors (1864-1960), first black physician practicing medicine west of the Rocky Mountains, included biographical information about Greenfield in their *Women of Distinction: Remarkable Works and Invincible Character* and *Noted Negro Women, Their Triumphs and Activities*, respectively, in 1893. Except for Hopkins in 1903, no one wrote about Greenfield again until Benjamin Griffith Brawley, a Professor of English at Howard University, who, beginning in 1918 with *The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States*, included Greenfield in three of his books that sought less of a celebration reliant upon pathos and more of a historical documentation of Black historical figures (The other two texts are *Negro Builders and Heroes* (1937) and *Black Abolitionists* (1969)). Much like Majors’ and Scruggs’ compiled histories, Hopkins’s “Famous Women” represents ideal models of Black womanhood.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

novel *Of One Blood*, Hopkins shows the difficulty of a Black woman celebrity navigating and discovering her identity and history within structural domains of power that have rendered her invisible and silent. Hopkins’s diverse and prolific oeuvre—from musical plays to serialized articles and novels—reflect the political intersections of documenting, remembering, and theorizing history.

Hopkins countered the critical practice of identifying Black women singers through their white counterparts by situating Greenfield among other Black women concert singers including Madame Annie Pauline Pindell, and Emma Louise Hyers, as well as two singers still alive in 1901, Anna Madah and Madame Marie Selika. Hopkins resists the entertainment industry’s structural and cultural domains of power that compared Pindell to her white counterpart Alboni, by situating Greenfield and Pindell, two Black women singers, together, in comparison: “The compass of this singer’s voice [Pindell’s] was the same as the ‘Black Swan’s,’ embracing twenty-seven notes, from G in bass clef to E in treble clef. Musical critics compared her to Madame Alboni.” In changing the entertainment industry’s standard of elevating white women singers above Black women singers, Hopkins depicts Greenfield as a standard to measure the other singers by, which challenges the critical tradition of comparing Black women singers to their white counterparts. Moreover, her entry on Greenfield and other “Phenomenal Vocalists” documents a form of knowledge and history making that had remained invisible in published

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9 Emma Louise (c. 1857-1901) and Anna Madah (c. 1855-1929) were known as the Hyers sisters who sang in Black musical theater productions.
10 Madame Marie Selika (c. 1849-1937) was a renowned Black woman coloratura soprano.
works on Greenfield: African-American women writing about African-American women performers, which illuminates complex experiences of body and voice that had not been included in historical and narrative representations. Hopkins performs a representation of documentation and memory that resists the entertainment industry’s oppressive tradition of privileging white women singers by situating Greenfield’s talent in relation to other prominent contemporary Black women singers as she was beginning to slip away in public consciousness at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{12}

Much of the information Hopkins writes indeed fulfills the disciplinary expectations of historical writing including documenting origins, significant landmarks, and interactions with powerful political figures; yet Hopkins also expands that frame by theorizing the domains of power Black women celebrities navigate. Hopkins highlights Black women within institutions of primary and higher education, literary and visual art marketplaces, lecture circuits, women’s clubs. Hopkins’s documentation of Black women’s histories becomes a performance which counters traditional means of history-making. Intentionally choosing to open the feature with “Phenomenal Vocalists,” Hopkins significantly argues for the political salience of Black women singers and music in the postbellum United States: “What a beneficent art is music. So deeply impressed was one celebrated man of the immense importance and influence of music that he is

\textsuperscript{12} The most recent bibliographic record on Greenfield which appears in \textit{The Pen is Ours: A Listing of Writings by and about African-American Women before 1910 with Secondary Bibliography to the Present} (1991) shows that African-American reporter, medical professional, and writer Monroe Alpheus Majors’s \textit{Noted Negro Women, Their Triumphs and Activities} (1893) and African-American writer Lawson Scruggs’s \textit{Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character} (1893) were the last two works published on Greenfield within compiled historical bibliographies on successful African-American women in the nineteenth century. Their bibliography reflects that nothing else was published on Greenfield again until African-American literary scholar Benjamin Griffith Brawley’s historical bibliographies compilation \textit{The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States} in 1918. The bibliography, although published in 1991, does not include Hopkins’s 1901 feature on Greenfield.
said to have exclaimed, ‘Let who will make the laws of the people, but let me make their songs’.\(^{13}\) While Hopkins’s “Famous Men” presented Black men negotiating domains of power within politics, education, and writing, she turns to the musical arts as the origin point for the women she will showcase. Hopkins draws this quote, which proclaims the political importance of music equal or more significant than laws, from an 1851 text, “Music in the Family,” by Reverend William C. Whitcomb, compiled in Mother’s Assistant, Young Lady’s Friend, and Family Manual published by Stone & Pratt in Boston.\(^{14}\) Hopkins begins the “Famous Women” feature by citing a historical text that reflected the material reality of white women, and continues to link white women’s cultural touchstones to Black women through Greenfield’s entry.

Hopkins shapes a matrix of women performers that includes white women who have been more widely documented and celebrated in popular and academic publications to insert Greenfield into a historical narrative that legitimates her through her talent and through the connective nature of music. While she acknowledges the historical tradition of associating women singers with their respective national identities, she expands that frame. Black women celebrities were not claimed as widely by their nations. She does not pit Greenfield against other white performers, as so many writings about Greenfield did, but imagines them within a landscape of global singers: “The magnificent voices of Malibran, Alboni, Parepa-Rosa, Titiens, Jenny Lind, Nilsson, Lucca, Kellogg and Cary need no monuments to preserve their memories to

\(^{13}\) Hopkins, Pauline E. *Daughter of the Revolution*, p. 113.

Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

humanity. The great artist belongs to God, and is imperishable.”¹⁵ Dworkin explains that Hopkins intentionally evidences her assertion that music, and musical talent, spans many nations. In reflecting that there are no monuments of *any* of these famous singers, including Greenfield, Hopkins brings these women together as equally legitimate historical subjects. Hopkins situates these women singers collectively above and beyond their respective entertainment industries and the power dynamics inherent in those industries within a divine context.

Hopkins begins “Famous Women” by representing Greenfield through historical traditions that document her origin, significant landmarks, and affiliation with powerful political figures. For instance, Hopkins concludes her entry on Greenfield with the certification of Queen Victoria’s request to hear her sing and a reflection: “But Miss Greenfield always remained the same. Her head was not turned by flattery. She was ever brave, patient, noble, ambitious, charitable to all, remembering her own hard struggles. She died in Philadelphia, Penn., in 1876.”¹⁶ Like many other Black male writers such as Trotter, Majors, Scruggs¹⁷ who wrote about Greenfield within compiled histories of successful African Americans, there are inherent assumptions that shape who Greenfield was in these writers’ idealizations. While Hopkins begins Greenfield’s entry in her “Famous Women” feature by drawing upon traditional historical form, she expands the historical frame by theorizing the complex relationship between her voice and body as a Black woman singer-celebrity.

Hopkins wrote and serially published *Of One Blood* in *Colored American Magazine* a year after the “Famous Women” feature. *Of One Blood* traces the interweaving stories of three characters, Reuel Briggs, Aubrey Livingston, and soprano singer Dianthe Lusk. Notably,

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¹⁷ See footnote 158 in this chapter for further information on these Black men writers.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

Hopkins represents Dianthe’s experiences moving through various institutions and the various oppression she faces based on her race and gender. Reading Hopkins’s “Famous Women” feature with her serialized novel *Of One Blood* continues to expand and enrich the historical frame of Black women singer-celebrities. Just as Ira Dworkin explains that Hopkins’ “Famous Women” feature “articulates a fundamental component of Hopkins’s literary and political vision, namely her feminist insistence on the full and active participation of women in all aspects of the public sphere,” so does *Of One Blood* perform political resistance to the oppression Black women singers faced even when achieving celebrity status.\(^{18}\)

*Of One Blood: Fictionalizing History and Historicizing Fiction*

Hopkins’s non-fiction and fiction writings about Black women singers emphasize the political and intertwined nature of objective history and imaginative fiction. Considering her description of Greenfield as having an “angel’s voice” that dwelled “within a casket ebony-bound,”\(^{19}\) *Of One Blood* can be read as a cautionary tale: the consequences of only paying attention to Black women celebrities’ voices, specifically in historical representation, leads to erasing their material realities of oppression and resistance. For those who represent and consume performances by Black women celebrities, Hopkins’s *Of One Blood* is a complex treatise about how historical representation of Black women celebrities needs to be more nuanced and understand how power impacts their navigation of institutions; for Black women singer-celebrities themselves, Hopkins’s *Of One Blood* is a call for the urgency to know one’s identity within the context of history to be able to navigate structural and interpersonal domains of power. Hopkins shows, through Aubrey’s character, that the failure to engage in this work


leads to oppression, and in Dianthe’s case, death. In this light, this chapter explores the following questions: How does fiction provide an understanding of Black women celebrities’ experiences within domains of power that history, and specifically biography, cannot? What does expanding focus from Dianthe’s voice to how her body moves through institutions illuminate about Black women celebrities, power dynamics, and history? In short, this chapter follows Dianthe throughout the text and analyzes the power dynamics that she navigates to engender an intersectional reading of Black women singer-celebrities at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States.

Much scholarship on Greenfield focuses on her body and voice in relation to (white) audience reception; the same is true for scholarship on Of One Blood. Daphne Brooks’ performance-based reading of Of One Blood emphasizes a need to “[pay] close attention to the heretofore undertheorized genealogy of postbellum black women’s theatrical performances and the ways this cultural work fused racial uplift with revised black female subjectivity at the dawn of a new century.” Building upon Brooks’s focus on Dianthe’s performances that center experience on the Fisk Singers themselves and not the white audiences, this chapter asks, in addition to what Dianthe sings, what does Dianthe say and do, and what doesn’t she say and do? Why is it essential to bring an intersectional lens to Dianthe’s representation? What is the material reality of Dianthe’s life? What assumptions do we make about Dianthe? While the first chapter focuses on archival materials to show how Greenfield navigated power systems, and how others represented Greenfield navigating power systems, this section analyzes how Hopkins represents and doesn’t represent Dianthe navigating power systems that both erase and give

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presence to her material realities. Hopkins calls attention to the fact that *Of One Blood* can be read as a warning that if you only focus on the performing voice to understand Black women singer-celebrities, then you’re failing to acknowledge and document the institutional oppression that Black women have had to, and arguably continue to, navigate to empower themselves.

**Applying an Intersectional Analysis to *Of One Blood*: Illuminating Structural and Interpersonal Domains of Power**

*Of One Blood* opens in Boston around the turn of the twentieth century, within the institution of the American university. Reuel, who “sat among his books and the apparatus for experiments… was a recognized power in the medical profession. In brain diseases he was an authority.”21 Hopkins’s represents Reuel wielding institutional power as a man. Even though Reuel reads texts on mysticism, being a “close student of what might be termed ‘absurdities’ of supernatural phenomena,”22 he legitimately navigates and exists within the university’s institutional structure. Aubrey, his only friend, is a medical student as well. From the beginning of the text, Hopkins not only situates Reuel and Aubrey as powerful men within educational and medical institutions, she also situates Reuel’s and Aubrey’s bodies within the complex context they navigate. Hopkins describes Reuel as origin-less, like the ways that she describes the men in her “Famous Men” feature: “None of the students associated together in the hive of men under the fostering care of the ‘benign mother’ knew aught of Reuel Brigg’s origin. It was rumored at first that he was of Italian birth, then they ‘guessed’ he was a Japanese, but whatever land claimed him as a song, all voted him a genius in his scientific studies.”23 In not knowing Reuel’s

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

origins, his schoolmates could project any identity onto him; however, Hopkins makes it clear that his peers did not associate blackness with him because of his “genius,” emphasizing his complex navigation of the university as a white passing man.

Hopkins similarly describes the bodies of the two main male characters in terms of the power they wield within the institutions that they navigate. For instance, Hopkins writes that “Mother Nature had blessed Reuel Briggs with superior physical endowments…but as yet he had never had reason to count them blessings.” Hopkins highlights the cultural domains of power that privilege whiteness. Hyper-focusing on Reuel’s features highlights institutional obsession with racially categorizing bodies, reinforced by the early twentieth-century legal system which legislated with the “one drop rule” that constituted someone Black and therefore inferior and legally less-than within legal institutions. Hopkins continues to describe Reuel in terms of white features, ending with a “tint suggesting olive, an almost sallow color which is a mark of strong, melancholic temperaments.”

The fixation on skin tone, and linking the skin tone to natural qualities such as temperament, continues to provide insight into the social context Hopkins represents, in which blackness is understood in comparison to whiteness, and biracial identity causes tension within institutions and power dynamics that historically rely on binary understandings of racial identity. When Aubrey enters the room, the narrator describes that his “voice was soft and musical…The light revealed a tall man with the beautiful face of a Greek God; but the sculptured features did not inspire confidence. There was that in the countenance of Aubrey that engendered doubt.”

24 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, p. 3.
interpersonal domains of power of the early twentieth century in the United States, and, mirrors societal obsession with how racial identity, institutionally defined by blood with the “one drop rule,” manifests, or doesn’t manifest, physically on the body. Hopkins represents Reuel’s body as more difficult to read and categorize as the narrator closely examines him, while Aubrey’s body reads more easily and clearly as white.

In writing a dialogue between Reuel and Aubrey which communicates their values about history, legacy, and identity, Hopkins de-naturalizes assumptions about the connection between race and personality characteristics. Reuel urges Aubrey to join him in “carrying forward a search for more light in the mysteries of existence” by asking, “Say what you will; ridicule me, torment me, but you know as well as I that the wonders of a material world cannot approach those of the undiscovered country within ourselves—the hidden self lying quiescent in every human soul.” Aubrey responds, “True, Reuel, and I often wonder what becomes of the mind and morals, distinctive entities grouped in the republic known as man, when death comes.”

Reuel articulates a dichotomy between “a material world” and “an undiscovered country within ourselves” while Aubrey articulates dichotomies between “mind and morals,” as well as life and death. These dichotomies allow the structural domain of power within the university to keep things categorized, include certain narratives, as well as exclude other narratives. Directly following this dialogue, Aubrey says, “And now, Reuel, come down from the clouds, and come with me to a concert.” They move from one structural domain of power, manifest in the educational institution of the American university, and shift from another structural domain of power manifest in the entertainment institution of the concert hall.

Within the concert hall, the men attend a concert put on by the Fisk Singers, a historical group of African American student-singers who performed spirituals for prominently white audiences. Their performances were fundraisers for Fisk University, one of the first African American universities in the United States. Hopkins provides a glimpse into the power dynamics women performers navigate, specifically in which men discuss the physical attributes and talent of the group’s star soprano, Dianthe Lusk: “‘They say there are some pretty girls in the troupe; one or two as white as we.’ ‘They range at home from alabaster to ebony.’ ‘The soprano soloist is great; heard her in New York.’ At this there was a general laugh ‘loveliest girl, by jove, you know.’ ‘That explains your presence here, Vance; what’s her name?’”28 One of Aubrey’s friends, Charlie Vance replies that “Aubrey, even your cold blood will be stirred at sight of her exquisite face; of her voice I will not speak; I cannot do it justice,”29 which solidifies that these moments of dialogue between Aubrey’s and Reuel’s peers in attendance reiterate the objectification of the Black singers that white audiences enacted from Greenfield’s time in the mid- and late nineteenth century, and still into the novel’s present time at the turn of the twentieth century. They objectify Dianthe Lusk, as well as the other women in the troupe, by commenting positively on their light skin tone and white physical features. Amidst the serialized novel’s ghost stories, Aubrey’s deadly scheming, and Reuel travelling back in time to ancient Ethiopia, Hopkins shows how her voice, story, and experience can be easily elided within structural domains of power that render Black women (and, perhaps white women, as we see with Molly’s and the other women in the novel’s oppression and lack of presence within domains of power) mute and invisible. From the university to the concert hall, these men continue to move through

other institutions throughout the course of the narrative: the hospital, home spaces in Boston and Maryland, an even an historical excavation site in Ethiopia.

In the home space of Boston, Reuel and Aubrey pine for Dianthe and try to keep her identity both as Dianthe, and as a Black woman who passes as white hidden from others; Hopkins represents how Dianthe experiences oppression based on her gender and race, and warns present Black women singer-celebrities specifically, and Black women generally, about the oppression that Dianthe experiences. Reuel and Aubrey nervously watch Dianthe as she interacts with other women. While Reuel’s desire for Dianthe leads him to marry her and travel to Ethiopia to make money in order to wield more financial power within another structural domain of power—marriage—Aubrey’s desire for Dianthe leads him to deceive Reuel, and go to Ethiopia so that he can kill his fiancée Molly Vance, tells Dianthe he knows her true racial identity and that Reuel does not (even though he does), and scares Dianthe into marrying him since he successfully convinces her that Reuel could never love a Black woman. Although Reuel is overall well-intentioned and Aubrey is not, Hopkins shows the consequences that Dianthe faces as a Black woman navigating structural domains of power that manifest in interpersonal interactions with these men.

Bringing an intersectional lens to Dianthe’s representation illuminates the alarming nonchalance with which the people within institutions respond to Dianthe’s disappearance; moreover, Hopkins represents Aubrey’s seemingly ambivalent work towards finding Dianthe as an act of ensuring her invisibility. For instance, when they plan how to handle Dianthe’s future, Aubrey says to Reuel: “We’ll put off the evil day to any date you may name, Briggs; for my part, I would preserve her incognito indefinitely.”30 Reuel, well-meaning, but in many ways clueless,

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30 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, p. 36.
agrees with Aubrey. Aubrey then sets his own strategy in place, hiring a detective to find out that according to the Fisk Singers, “Miss Lusk had left the troupe to enter the service of a traveling magnetic physician—a woman—for a large salary. They (the troupe) were now in Europe and heard nothing of Miss Lusk since.”31 The detective “found the woman in a small town near Chicago. She said that she had no knowledge of Miss Lusk’s whereabouts. Dianthe had remained with her three weeks, and at the end of that time had mysteriously disappeared; she had not heard of her since.”32 Even though Dianthe was well-known by audiences, Hopkins shows how she quickly disappears from public consciousness.

Hopkins continues by showing that Dianthe’s existence within the concert hall was fleeting to her audiences, specifically the men: “Strangely enough, none of the men that had admired the colored artist who had enthralled their senses by her wonderful singing a few weeks before, recognized her in the hospital waif consecrated to the service of science.”33 Following this judgmental lash against men who had applauded her talent, only to forget about a “few weeks” later, the narrator confirms that “Her incognito was complete.”34 Within structural domains of power that erase and render Black women mute, Dianthe was hidden within institutions of education, entertainment, finance, and law. She was supposedly protected by Reuel and Aubrey, but without agency to protect herself.

The prominent argument of this text, that we must follow God’s word, “Of one blood have I made all nations of men to dwell upon the whole face of the earth” and that the narrator interprets as “No man can draw the dividing line between two races” necessitates reading

31 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 38.
32 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 39.
33 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 39.
34 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 39.
Reuel’s, Aubrey’s, and Dianthe’s representations together. Reading Dianthe’s representations more closely, specifically by shifting focus to Hopkins’s representation of her lived experiences, illuminates another way to understand Hopkins theorizing how Black women celebrities navigate systems of power within the specific context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but also perhaps how those same power dynamics perpetuate over time and impact Black women today.

Situating Dianthe within Structural and Interpersonal Domains of Power

Within the concert hall, Hopkins shows how the structural domain of power within an entertainment institution renders Black women. The narrator describes the moment when Dianthe takes the stage:

Scarcely waiting for a silence, a female figure rose and came slowly to the edge of the platform and stood in the blaze of lights with hands modestly clasped before her…Fair as the fairest woman in the hall, with wavy bands of chestnut hair, and great, melting eyes of brown, soft as those of childhood; a willowy figure of exquisite mould, clad in a sombre (sic) gown of black. There fell a voice upon the listening ear, in celestial showers of silver that passed all conceptions, all comparisons, all dreams; a voice beyond belief—a great soprano of unimaginable beauty, soaring heavenward in mighty intervals.  

Hopkins’s characterization of Dianthe coming to the front of the stage to sing reminds us of the historical performances of Greenfield and those who came after her, leading up to Dianthe as she “modestly clasped” her hands and situated her body to sing. This description explicitly articulates that this logic does not hold up since “She was not in any way the preconceived idea of a Negro.” She wears a black gown, which echoes Hopkins’s characterization of Greenfield from her “Famous Women” feature as a “casket ebony-bound” with an “angel’s voice.” Although Dianthe’s physical features are lighter and more delicate than Greenfield’s Hopkins

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

shows that as a Black woman, she is still vulnerable within institutions of power. The time that Hopkins takes to describe Dianthe’s body is like Reuel’s; in writing through an examination of her body and attempting to translate it into race, Hopkins counters the structural domain of power which sought to enforce the “one drop rule” and reinforce the idea that blood circumscribes race, and that race, based on blood manifests on the body and translates into a legible identity.

After the lengthy description of Dianthe’s physical appearance, Hopkins describes Dianthe’s voice as “celestial showers of silver” that echo her description of Greenfield’s voice being an “angel’s.” However, Hopkins first focuses on the materiality of Dianthe’s body, since that is what audiences saw and judged even before and singer performed, as we learned with Greenfield. Dianthe’s body is, as Alex Black refers to it, a resonant body that “emphasizes the influence a performer’s voice had over the way a reviewer saw her body” and “suggests how her voice resounds in descriptions of her body”37; in another way, it is a body that exists within and navigates structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains of power including legal institutions obsessed with defining racial identity based on blood, and entertainment institutions using specific manifestations of racial identity—specifically Dianthe’s biracial body that fulfills European standards of beauty— for profit.

Hopkins’s representation of the audience’s emotive response to Dianthe’s performance, is a resistant performance as a fictional representation that parallels the historical documentation of Black women’s experiences. Hopkins also draws upon songs that reanimate the history of slavery, which she represents Dianthe and the Fisk Singers performing: “All the horror, the

Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

degradation from which a race had been delivered were in the pleading strains of the singer’s voice…It pictured to that self-possessed, highly-cultured New England assemblage as nothing ever else had, the awfulness of the hell from which a people had been happily plucked.”

Hopkins emphasizes the historical context in which these songs existed; however, at the same time, Hopkins shows how these prominently white audiences consumed these songs as emotional pieces that separated them as different from the Southerners who held Black people in slavery.

Highlighting the historical context in which these songs existed, and holding them up in relation to the racist, sexist, objectifying conversations the men have leading up to the performance, show that white Northerners still perpetuate oppression within the structural domains of power, and Dianthe, the biracial woman, is the material victim of this oppression.

**Structural and Interpersonal Domains of Power in the Hospital Ward**

While Dianthe’s experience in the hospital can be read as a metaphorical reanimation that allows for fluidity of present and past, real and unreal, living and ghostly, it can also be read as an instance of the hospital institution exploiting a Black woman’s body for profit. This isn’t a new trend at the turn of the twentieth century: J. Marion Sims performed gynecological experiments on enslaved women in the nineteenth century; a statue commemorating him as the “father of gynecological medicine” was removed in April of 2018 after activists from the Black Youth Project protested a year before. Henrietta Lacks’s story of exploitation sanctioned within the hospital space—specifically that her cells were harvested after she died from cervical cancer without her consent in 1951 and used for medical research that lead to Jonas Salk developing the

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polio vaccine—has come to the international stage with Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) and George C. Wolfe’s film adaptation (2017) starring Oprah Winfrey. Today, the hospital ward can be a structural and interpersonal domain of power nightmare for African American women. The story of a contemporary Black woman celebrity—Serena Williams—shows that even if you are a celebrity, if you’re a Black woman, you still aren’t necessarily protected within institutions: after giving birth to her daughter, she realized she was suffering a pulmonary embolism, which she was very familiar with. She notified the nurse, but the nurse didn’t take her self-diagnosis seriously. She asked a doctor for a CT scan and blood thinner, but he responded with an ultrasound of her legs. Finally, after she pleaded with these health professionals, they did what she asked, and she was right. Many major news outlets covered this story, and acknowledged in different ways that “Life-threatening complications in the delivery room, and during recovery, are all too common—particularly for black and Hispanic women.”

Hopkins stages the hospital as another domain of power where Black women can too easily be rendered powerless. A nurse tells Reuel to come with her to the women’s ward, explaining that “Doctor Livingston pronounces her dead, but it doesn’t seem possible. So young, so beautiful.” The nurse laments Dianthe’s death in a well-meaning way that objectifies her as young and beautiful and that she couldn’t die because of her physicality, neglecting the realities of oppressive domains of power that are emotionally, and physically, violent for African American women. Hopkins refers to them as doctors for the first time at this moment in the text. The reader, and Reuel, are meant to trust Aubrey Livingston based on his doctor title: “Your

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science won’t save her. The poor girl is already cold and stiff.”⁴¹ At this point, the reader doesn’t yet know who the girl is: “He moved aside disclosing to Reuel’s gaze the lovely face of Dianthe Lusk!”⁴² Leading up to this point, our understanding of Dianthe was through a nurse and Aubrey—only after those mediating descriptions does Dianthe’s body manifest within the structural domain of power in the hospital. Following the reveal of Dianthe’s body, the narrator reflects:

Here is shown the setting free of a disciplined spirit giving up its mortality for immortality, -- the condition necessary to know God. Death! There is no death. Life is everlasting, and from its reality can have no end. Life is real and never changes, but preserves its identity eternally as the angels, and the immortal spirit of man, which are the only realities and continuities in the universe, God being over all, Supreme Ruler and Divine Essence from whom comes all life. Somewhat in this train ran Reuel’s thoughts as he stood beside the seeming dead girl, the cynosure of all the medical faculty there assembled. To the majority of those men, the case was an ordinary death, and that was all there was to it.⁴³

Within the structural domain of the hospital where he wields power through his doctor title, Reuel justifies performing his experimentation on Dianthe; she technically gave consent to him in a ghost form the evening before, when he saw her walking through the Vance’s garden, however, as a living person in a material body, she does not get to speak back to whether she’d like to be reanimated through Reuel’s animal magnetism experiments. Hopkins’s text makes the contours of this domain of power clear; Dianthe is the “cynosure” of the medical faculty who are all men, the “center of attention or admiration.” Men making a biracial woman the center of attention and/or admiration was toxic within the concert hall as well as the hospital.

Hopkins makes it clear that, however well-meaning, treating Black women’s bodies as objects within any domain of power is dangerous. The narrator describes that in planning to

⁴¹ Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 27.
⁴² Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 28.
⁴³ Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 28.
share his research on magnetism to save Dianthe, Reuel was “Absorbed in thoughts of the combat before him” and “was oblivious to all else as he bent over the lifeless figure on the cot. He was full of an earnest purpose…Suddenly he bent down and took both cold hands into his left and passed his right hand firmly over her arms from shoulder to wrist.”

Hopkins strategically chooses the word “combat” to highlight the consequences of masculine stereotypes on Black women within institutions such as the hospital, and highlights the visibility of her body as an object to be combatted. Although he is well-meaning, like the doctors who had collected Lacks’s cells after her death, there is still an alarming lack of consent. This well-meaning care of and desire for Dianthe within structural domains of power that render women, especially Black and biracial women, invisible and mute bleeds into Reuel’s intentions to take Dianthe out of the hospital and into another structural and interpersonal domain of power: marriage.

**Structural and Interpersonal Domains of Power: Marriage and Home in Boston**

Although Reuel’s intentions are well-meaning—to give Dianthe “Life and love and wifehood and maternity and perfect health” before she becomes conscious of “the sphere in which she was born,” to “Marry her before she awakens to consciousness of her identity” as a biracial woman—they are also alarming. Reuel reanimates Dianthe, and her existence becomes dependent on his. Her identity and history remain intentionally inaccessible to her, leaving her powerless to navigate systems of power that legally reinforce a “one drop rule” and hinder full equality within educational, entertainment, and legal institutions; at the same time, Aubrey does tell Dianthe of her racial identity once Reuel leaves on the expedition to Ethiopia to blackmail her to marry him. Hopkins shows, within many contexts, from the concert stage, to the hospital

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45 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, p. 44.
46 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, p. 43.
setting, to the domestic space, Black and biracial women experience many oppressions; Hopkins enacts a resistant performance by representing these realities in writing.

Hopkins enacts a resistant performance through her writing and representation of women’s experiences and vulnerabilities within various institutions. Specifically, while Reuel selfishly desires to marry Dianthe, it is Molly Vance, Charlie Vance’s wife, who, “thinking of that poor, pretty creature living ill in that gloomy hospital without a friend,” and proclaiming that “Men are selfish!” calls for Dianthe to escape the hospital and come visit Vance Hall, shifting into the cultural domain of power: the domestic space. Although Dianthe finds a meaningful connection and relationship with Molly, history reminds us, and so does Hopkins in her characterization of Aubrey, that Black and biracial women do not find safety in the domestic space, either. The structural and interpersonal domains of power represented by Aubrey and Reuel, in fact, seek to force women into solitude; when, “With the impulsiveness of youth, a wonderful friendship sprang up between” Molly and Dianthe, “Livingston and Briggs watched her with some anxiety.”47 In terms of the plot, they are curious if after being reanimated through magnetism she can take the strain, but they’re also anxious about her remembering who she is, and, on a grander scale, discovering who she is in relation to other women. If Dianthe has a friendship with another woman, then that means that she is no longer as dependent on the men as she initially was.

Closer attention to Dianthe’s dependence on Reuel and Aubrey within the institutions of marriage and the domestic sphere illuminate her material reality. For instance, Dianthe’s living conditions read like a contract: “Dianthe was domiciled under the roof of palatial Vance hall and the small annuity provided by the generous contributions of the physicians of the country was

placed in the hands of Mr. Vance, Sr., to be expended for their protégé." In this transaction, Dianthe moves from the hospital space to the domestic space, with money exchanging between men, in which the money is spent for her, not given to her.

Hopkins represents how powerless Dianthe is in relation to the men in the story specifically, and within the patriarchal system of the early twentieth century as a Black woman, generally; this representation through fictional writing is a performance of resistance since it makes oppressive forces visible and audible. Hypnosis is the means that Aubrey uses to literally dominate her, and could be read as a symbol for the oppressive forces of racism, sexism, and classism that Black people faced in the United States during the early twentieth century. Within the domestic sphere, Dianthe’s performance comes through her and is not given by her, or so it appears. After Reuel leaves for the expedition to Ethiopia, Dianthe plays the piano and sings in the parlor of the Vance’s home; Molly perceives this performance as a trance where Dianthe supposedly does not have control over her own voice and body, yet, what is at stake in Dianthe showing the audience in the parlor that, as a biracial woman singing a spiritual, that she is in control of her own voice and body? Dianthe, “Slowly, tremulously at first, pealed forth the notes: ‘Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land, Tell ol’ Pharaoh, let my people go’.” As Dianthe sings, the audience looks “horrified into each other’s faces” because they hear not only Dianthe’s soprano voice, but also “A weird contralto, veiled as it were, rising and falling upon every wave of the great soprano.” Just as Dianthe’s performance on the stage with the Fisk Singers left her vulnerable to Aubrey’s bad intentions and actions, this performance in the parlor also leaves her

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48 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 53.
49 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 67.
50 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 67.
51 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 67.
vulnerable to his scheme of blackmailing her; her voice in this instance shocks and awes the audience, yet Hopkins refuses to explain if the forces at hand are Dianthe’s talent, an angel-like presence, or, perhaps a combination of both.

Although we can certainly read Dianthe’s hypnotism through the lens of mysticism, we can also consider it as a manifestation of Black women singers historically navigating domains of power. Brooks’s analysis of the women characters Jinny, Juno, and Mammy in Hopkins’s musical play *Peculiar Sam Or, The Underground Railroad* provides a way to understand the double, or multiple voicing she represents through Dianthe. The characters of *Peculiar Sam* sing in multiple registers at the same time to represent and enact resistance, as “Juno fills out the bright and ethereal vocals of the two sopranos with a singing role meant to operate on the lower (‘underground’) frequencies of musical as well as thematic performance.” Brooks continues by explaining that these women, “Together, Mammy, Jinny, and Juno compose Hopkins’s trinity of rebel women—signifying elders, soprano songbirds, and alto combat soldiers.” This instance also compresses the past experiences of Greenfield and other Black women singers who awed, and tricked, their audiences by singing two registers, as well as participated within the disciplinary domain of power by matching pitches that the white men accompanists would play to prove their talent. The potential in fiction, versus the actual stage, allows for a reshaping where one woman can sing with two voices at the same time—a compression of reality. Hopkins represents this performance of double-voicing to call white listeners’ attention to the negative effects of double-consciousness that impacts Black people’s existence, and horrify white listeners into being aware of the past, present, and, if nothing changes, inevitable future of oppression that African Americans face even if they achieve celebrity status.

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

After the guests are frightened from the ghostly double voice that manifests when Dianthe sings, Hopkins continues to emphasize the importance of Dianthe to remember her painful past within the structural domain of power that seeks to erase her identity and experiences. The narrator explains that “[h]er thoughts were painful. Memory had returned in full save as to her name.”

However, even though she remembers what she knew except for her name, the information that she had in the first place was incomplete. Reuel, however well-meaning, told her to trust Aubrey, so when he tells her he can save her, she proclaims, “Save me!” The story that Aubrey tells her does not save her, since within the structural domain of power that makes interracial marriages illegal, Dianthe is vulnerable to Aubrey’s manipulation. Specifically, he lies to her and tells her that Reuel did not know that she “was a Negress.”

Aubrey tells Dianthe that he has “learned” to love her and that she must marry him. She calls for him to “pity” her, but he responds, “I can love, but cannot pity.” The narrator explains that “she tried to defy him, but she knew that she had lost her will-power and was but a puppet in the hands of this false friend.” Dianthe is aware of the lack of agency she has, but previously had, which the reference to “lost” suggests; what led her to lose her will-power? The structural and interpersonal domains of power that render her invisible and mute, from Reuel’s and Aubrey’s work in the university, and hospital, and within the institution of marriage.

**Structural and Interpersonal Domains of Power: Home in the American South**

Hopkins juxtaposes Dianthe’s experiences in the domestic space of the American North and South to reiterate that Black women continue to navigate oppressive domains of power over

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54 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, p. 68.
time and space, and within institutions that historically have defined Black women as unequal and rendered their experiences silent and invisible. While Reuel goes “home” to Ethiopia where he learns from the character Jim Titus, who Aubrey had hired to ensure Reuel’s demise on the excavation trip, that he, Dianthe, and Aubrey are related, Dianthe goes “home” to the American South, specifically Maryland, back to the Livingston plantation where she and her brothers were born to find out from her grandmother, Aunt Hannah, about the incestuous marriages to her brothers. Hopkins grounds Dianthe’s discovery of her history and identity within the material reality of the American South in contrast to Reuel; Hopkins constructs his true home in the narrative as Ethiopia. Hopkins animates the history that Aunt Hannah tells to reiterate that Black and biracial women have not found safety in the domestic space, but can discover themselves and temporarily find safety among other Black women.

While Dianthe’s innocence has already metaphorically died once, by finding out about the reality of her race from Aubrey, her innocence dies again in going back to the South; however, within domains of power, what value does innocence have? And is there a false dichotomy set between innocence and the revealing of information that needs to be given up? Hopkins shows that historically, Black women have always already lost their innocence because within domains of power, they are vulnerable to exploitation and oppression. While Aunt Hannah tells Dianthe of her identity and history, she “sat like a stone woman,” “cold and white as marble.” While this characterization figuratively represents Dianthe as dead, it also echoes her characterization of Greenfield in her “Famous Women” entry, a “casket-ebony bound.”

Because of the structural and interpersonal domains of power that Reuel and Aubrey represent

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58 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 176.
59 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 177.
through their passion within the concert hall, hospital, and Boston home space, “All hope was gone; despair was heavy on her young shoulders whose life was blasted in its bloom by the passions of others.” However, after Dianthe processes the information Aunt Hannah shares, the narrator proclaims, “But she was not dead” and following, Dianthe becomes the most agentic compared to any other time in the story.

Hopkins represents Dianthe remembering who she is in the presence of Aunt Hannah, a resistant performance that critiques the well-meaning racism that Black people experienced in the northern United States during the early twentieth Century. Dianthe now remembers in the American South with Aunt Hannah, compared to the American North with Aubrey, and we learn about the past material realities that we had not known about before:

Memories crowded around her, wreathing themselves in shapes which floated mistily through her brain. Her humble school days at Fisk; her little heart leaping at the well-won prize; the merry play with her joyous mates; in later years, the first triumphant throb when wondering critics praised the melting voice, and world-admiring crowds applauded. And, O, the glorious days of travel in Rome and Florence! the (sic) classic scenes of study; intimate companionship with Beethoven, Mozart and Hayden; the floods of inspiration poured in strains of self-made melody upon her soul. Then had followed the reaction, the fall into unscrupulous hands, and the ruin that had come upon her innocent head.

This is a significant moment where we gain the most personal insight into Dianthe, as well as her experience compared to any other place in the story including what she was passionate about and the interpersonal exchanges among friends that she cherished, not that of others who project what they’re passionate about and cherish onto her, as exhibited in the consequences of her presence in the hospital with Reuel and her marriage with Aubrey. While we learn that she loved performing Beethoven, Mozart, and Hayden, when Dianthe returns from Aunt Hannah’s and is back in Aubrey’s house, he asks Dianthe to perform. She again sings “Go

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60 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 177.
61 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 179.
down, Moses”—this song is the one she turns to within oppressive structural and interpersonal domains of power, which, for her, was also perpetuated by the Fisk Singers. The stage that the Fisk Singers had granted her had led to Reuel and Aubrey to pursue her. While she remembers the music of Beethoven, Mozart, and Hayden, she chooses to sing “Go Down Moses” to reassure Aubrey that she hasn’t changed, and hasn’t remembered or learned anything further. At the same time, “Go Down Moses” now has a different meaning for her, as the context of her understanding her own identity has changed.

In her newfound sense of agency and vengeance considering the information that Aunt Hannah shares with her, Dianthe attempts to lash out at Aubrey and poison him; however, Dianthe meets her demise, resisting to the end. Aubrey discovers Dianthe’s plan and forces her to drink the poisoned water she had prepared after learning about her origins from Aunt Hannah. While he forces her to “Drain the glass to Reuel!” she chooses to. She ultimately gets the last word in this interpersonal domain of power: Aubrey proclaims “Farewell, my love…When we meet, ‘twill be—” and Dianthe interjects “In judgment, Aubrey; and may God have mercy on our guilty souls!” Hopkins keeps readers’ eyes focused both on Dianthe’s spiritual presence and physical body that was destroyed by Aubrey’s hands:

The long white drapery of her morning robe fell about her like a shroud, yet, white as it was, contrasted painfully with the livid ash-hue of her skin. Her arms were thin and blue, her hands transparent; her sunny hair hung in long disheveled, waving masses, the picture of neglect; the sunken, wan brow, and livid lips, the heavy eyes with deep, black halos round them—all these made up a ruined temple. Hopkins refuses to eroticize Dianthe’s body in death; this description makes the men’s dialogues about Dianthe’s body at the beginning of the story before she appears in the concert hall even more reprehensible. Hopkins's description shows the material consequences of objectifying

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

Black women celebrities; while she emphasizes Dianthe’s humanity and mortality, she also celebrates the spiritual being that continues to live long after Dianthe’s physical body becomes a victim of the oppressive and violence structural and interpersonal domains of power.

While Hopkins makes Dianthe’s physical and spiritual beings visible, at the same time, she also respectfully veils Dianthe from the oppressive men and systems she encounters. There is no climactic point at which Dianthe dies, instead, the reader moves through a liminal state shifting between life and death; this liminal state is documented as reality. The narrator eulogizes, “Here we drop the veil. Let no human eye behold the writhings of that suffering face, the torture of that soul unmoored, and cast upon the sea of wildest passion, without the pilot, principle, or captain of all salvation, God.”

Although, this liminal state is still grounded in material realities and feelings that call attention to the destructive structural and interpersonal domains of power that erase and neglect Black women: “O, ‘twas agony to be alone! She could not bear it. She would call her maid; but no, her cold unimpassioned face would bring no comfort to her aching heart, aching for pity, for some cheering bosom, where she might sob her ebbing life away.”

She finally finds consolation and “joy” as “old Aunt Hannah’s arms enfold her.” Hopkins reveals Black women singer-celebrities’ reality of loneliness in the nineteenth and century. Carla Peterson’s assertion that although African-American women writers did not have their own nuclear families, they still were “ever aware of the importance of preserving the integrity of black family life and its domestic networks…these black women sought to make of the family a site of cultural resistance”

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67 Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word*, p. 15.
Reuel, and Aubrey all actually being related, as a “site of cultural resistance” to interrogate how Black women experience vulnerability and imagine how they can empower themselves.

While Dianthe is alone for most of the narrative, and does not wield agency with the domains of power she inhabits, Hopkins represents her gaining agency and strength in relation to embracing her past, and embracing Aunt Hannah. Within this liminal space, Dianthe also proclaims

Welcome, great masters of the world’s first birth! All hail, my royal ancestors—Candace, Semiramis, Dido, Solomon, David and the great kinds of early days, and the great masters of the world of song. O, what long array of souls divine, lit with immortal fire from heaven itself? O, let me kneel to thee! And to thee, too, Beethoven, Mozart, thou sons of song! Divine ones, art thou come to take me home? Me, thy poor worshipper on earth? O, let me by thy child in paradise!68

Dianthe’s bodily death includes her proclaiming her reality and desire—she articulates consent to a higher power and celebrates her bodily death and spiritual birth, a core sentiment of many spirituals. Until the end, material and spiritual reality swirl; Reuel shows up, as she was waiting for him before passing on, and, “For a few brief moments, the wretched girl lived an age in heaven. The presence of that one beloved—this drop of joy sweetened all the bitter draught and made for her an eternity of compensation…she laid her weary head upon his shoulder and silently as the night passed through the portals of the land of souls.”69 While Hopkins’s representation is a complicated one in that the three main characters are all related by blood, representing Dianthe, as a biracial woman who faced danger for being married to a man because of her race, and temporarily finding solace in being united with her love emphasizes the material realities of Black and biracial women in the United States who faced many oppressive

68 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 187.
69 Hopkins, Of One Blood, p. 188.
institutions, including chattel slavery during the antebellum period and the inability to work in the same places as family members to make a living during the postbellum period.  

**Threads: Past, Present, and Future**

While Hopkins concludes the novel imagining Dianthe as a reincarnation of Queen Candace who lives on in the ancient Ethiopian city of Meroe with Reuel, Dianthe within the material reality of being a biracial woman ends with, “Dianthe was dead, poisoned; that was clear.” While her spiritual being lives on, Dianthe is a young woman who, within oppressive structural and interpersonal domains of power, dies at the hands of a man. While this chapter does focus on Dianthe’s material realities to reflect on how fiction is a powerful genre to represent the domains of power Black woman celebrities navigate, I’d like to explore some echoes of Greenfield throughout this text. First, the statement of Dianthe’s death is reminiscent of Greenfield’s *New York Times* obituary that begins with her cause of death, that she “died suddenly of paralysis last Friday morning at her home in Philadelphia.” If we begin with Greenfield’s cause of death, and only note the generic expectations of an obituary including birth, death, major milestones as understood in relation to marriage and children, and affiliations with important people, as Hopkins text perhaps shows, we miss out on a lot of rich information. Hopkins’s text, based on analyzing how information and knowledge manifests within domains of power, calls us to reflect on what’s been told about Black women celebrities’ experiences, what has yet to be told, what will never be told, and what will remain covered by the veil, either intentionally on the part of the singer, or intentionally on the part of domain of power that render Black women’s experiences invisible and silent.

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Although this chapter focuses on Dianthe’s material experiences, and intentionally shifts attention away from the supernatural aspects of this story, I’d like to return to the moment where Dianthe appears as a disembodied figure in Vance’s garden, and gives, based on Reuel’s perception, and Dianthe’s later confirmation in conversation, her consent to him to save her. After listening to a ghost story on Hallow’s Eve, Reuel walks around outside in the dark by himself. Suddenly, “He turned his head and saw a female figure just ahead of him in the path, coming toward him. He could not see her features distinctly, only the eyes—large, bright and dark. But their expression! Sorrowful, wistful—almost imploring—gazing straightforward, as if they saw nothing—like the eyes of a person entirely absorbed and not distinguishing one object from another.” After seeing the “female figure,” “the moon gave a distinct view of the lovely features of the jubilee singer—Dianthe Lusk.” She says to him “in a low, clear, passionless voice: You can help me, but not now; tomorrow…The time is not yet.” While Dianthe does later confirm in conversation with Reuel that she did say this to him when he’s caring for her at the hospital, what she says to him does echo Greenfield’s experience—Dianthe, and the Black women celebrities of the past, are already beyond hope in one way, but, white audiences, and people in general can do better with present and future Black women celebrities, and Black women in general.

By analyzing the archival remains of Greenfield, to the histories written by other Black women, to Dianthe’s representation, and even Hopkins’s experience, we become aware of the domains of power they navigate and resist within. Hopkins’s experience as a writer reflects a similar struggle she faced within structural and interpersonal domains of power—Booker T.

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

Washington bought the *Colored American Magazine*, and replaced Hopkins as editor. Alisha R. Knight argues that “Hopkins was more antagonistic towards Booker T. Washington and his supporters than previously believed.” Drawing upon primary sources, “especially Hopkins’s own voice,” Knight’s “analysis examines her private and public writings” to show the tensions that disenfranchised Hopkins. In terms of celebrity studies, this chapter can fruitfully respond to Su Holmes’s and Sean Redmond’s call “to return to the past” to enhance audience understanding of “the interplay between past and present.” In her album, *Invasion of Privacy* (2018), rapper and skyrocketing Black woman celebrity Cardi B articulates a similar sentiment of taking the care to understand the domains of power Black women navigate. In “Be Careful,” she speaks back to a man who cheats on her: “Yeah, it’s a not a threat, it’s a warnin’/ Be careful with me.” This quote resonates back in time considering how we shape Greenfield’s biographical information, and what legacy that shapes. This quote resonates back in time to many Black women whose legacies have been invisible. This quote resonates back in time to Dianthe within the structural and interpersonal domains of power where men in the concert hall, to Reuel and Aubrey in the hospital and domestic space fail to “be careful” with her. Returning to the past, as Hopkins does in *Of One Blood*, and as we read Hopkins’s early twentieth-century non-fiction and fiction in the twenty first century, emphasizes the vulnerability of Black women within racist, classist, and sexist systems, as well as to the past that Crenshaw reminds us of with her definition of intersectionality that encompasses Black women’s invisibility and silence within financial and

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legal systems. Cardi B’s quote resonates back in time to Dianthe within institutions where men in
the concert hall, to the hospital, and domestic space fail to “be careful” with her. Her material
reality reflects their failure to be careful with her identity, history, and legacy. Hopkins’s
representation of Dianthe theorizes Black women singer-celebrities at large, and that individuals
within power systems must take care in representing and interpreting Black women singer-
celebrities.

While many scholars have read this text through psychology and mysticism, future
readings of this text can consider the mysticism of Hopkins’s ghostly characterization of Dianthe
as what is referred to in our contemporary moment as “Black girl magic”—it’s not necessarily
mystical in the magical sense, but mystical and magical in the sense of Black girls and women
naming and celebrating successfully overcoming oppressive domains of power that erase and
render Black women invisible and mute. It’s magical in the sense of what Maya Angelou
proclaims in the poem “Our Grandmothers”: “I go forth/ Along, and stand as ten thousand.”78
It’s magical in the sense of Oprah’s drawing upon her connection to Angelou and echoing: “I
come as one, I stand as ten thousand.”79 Fiction has the potential to capture the multiplicity of
one’s experience and perception beyond a fixed origin that fulfills historical expectations,
landmark events, and affiliations to those in traditional power. Fiction has the potential to
summon and legitimate what Bakhtin refers to as “heteroglossia,”80 and amplify voices that

253-6.
79 “Oprah Winfrey: ‘I Stand As Ten Thousand’.” YouTube, uploaded by Stanford Graduate
School of Business, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Li0J57d3YA.
80 Bakhtin, Mikhail. “On Dialogism and Heteroglossia (the other(s)’ word).” The Dialogic
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domains of power erase and render invisible. In the next chapter, I continue to reflect on the power for the genre of poetry to illuminate the material realities of Black women celebrities.
Chapter 3: Sissieretta Jones

_I think that's still true today, is that the minstrel show was the primary form of American entertainment throughout the nineteenth century, which means it's deeply embedded in the DNA of the formation of this country, and we still see remnants of it, or manifestations of it, today. And in that way it speaks toward the past but it also speaks toward the present._

— Tyehimba Jess

..._I have a voice and I am striving to win the favor of the public by honest merit and hard work._

— Sissieretta Jones

Matilda Sissieretta Joyner Jones was born in Portsmouth, Virginia in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As a child, she “enjoyed singing, often climbing on chairs or tables in the house to sing before her mother chased her out.” After her younger brother died in 1876, her family moved to Rhode Island for better personal and professional opportunities. In 1883, she began to study at the Providence Academy of Music and eventually studied at the New England Conservatory of Music and the Boston Conservatory, and eventually performed at Madison...

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3 Maureen D. Lee explains that “No birth certificate has yet been found to verify Matilda Sissieretta Joyner’s birth date. Various sources give different dates for her birth,” providing various texts including her death certificate, the 1880 federal census, 1905 Rhode Island Census, and an 1896 interview with Jones that said 1869 (256). Jones (1868/9? -1933) was born in Portsmouth, Virginia. Her father was an African Methodist Episcopal Minister and her mother was a washerwoman and a church choir member. Their family moved to Providence, Rhode Island for her father’s minister career.

Square Garden, Carnegie Hall, Boston’s Music Hall, the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. In 1888, opera singer Adelina Patti’s manager saw her perform and suggested she tour with the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Around that time critics began to refer to Jones as “the Black Patti.” Just as white reviewers and audiences dubbed the first prominent African-American woman singer in antebellum America, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield “The Black Swan,” in comparison to her white, Swedish contemporary Jenny Lind, “the nightingale,” white reviewers and audiences dubbed Jones “the Black Patti,” comparing her to her Spanish prima donna contemporary Adelina Patti. The “Black Patti” nickname stayed with her throughout her career that spanned more than three decades.

This instance of identification is where we can begin to pinpoint the consequences of an oppressive entertainment industry in Jones’s context as an African-American woman soprano: white reviewers and audiences denied Jones individuality by naming her in relation to her white, European counterpart. However, naming and self-identifying is complicated since the naming can also be understood as complimentary, holding up Jones’s talent to that of Patti’s. As Maureen D. Lee explains in her 2013 biography of Jones, “Unfortunately Sissieretta did not leave diaries or letters that might have provided more insight into her private life;” however, Lee includes an instance in which a reporter quoted Jones reflecting on “The Black Patti” name:

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6 According to Lee, Patti (1843-1919) “was a white Spanish-born opera singer” considered “the most famous soprano of the last half of the nineteenth century” (p. 12).

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“It rather annoys me…I am afraid people will think I consider myself the equal of Patti herself. I assure you I don’t think so, but I have a voice and I am striving to win the favor of the public by honest merit and hard work.”

8 Jones communicates, in this quote, that she doesn’t like the “Black Patti” name, not because it denies her humanity, but because it gives her too much credit as an equal of Patti’s. African-American male poet Tyehimba Jess, through his poetry collection *Olio*, imagines Jones’s perceptions and experiences of African-Americans who influenced United States culture between the end of the Civil War and beginning of World War I. 9 For instance, in the poem “My Name Is Sissieretta Jones,” Jess offers another imagined angle of Jones’ perspective on the Black Patti nickname, one embedded within an entertainment industry that both raised her up and celebrated her as a great talent, and that also denied her individuality with the nickname. This chapter brings Jess’s poetry into the opaque archive of Jones’s historical presence, and analyzes the structure and content of *Olio* as a performance that argues that one voice is never just one voice, and that voice is embedded within complex matrices of power.

**A Note on the Composition of Olio**

In *Olio*, Jess creates and compiles what resembles a compendium of documents by and about African-American performers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Specifically, the material text of *Olio* is the size of a thick song book that might sit on the piano stand or that the reader could hold while reading or singing from. The text’s content also tangibly frames the

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10 The contents section of *Olio* reflects awareness of the power dynamics inherent in representing history, as the sections are separated into groups of texts through asterisks, but with no defining labels. *Olio* represents performers grounded in historical reality and expands upon their specific material conditions and interiorities; in short *Olio* expands the frame of history making as a way of understanding African-American performers within their complex contexts.
reader encountering, reanimating, and traversing multiple paths of history as a performer in the size and shape of the text which is reminiscent of a songbook. In understanding the self as performer, the reader can begin to understand how audiences’ performances as consumers and reviewers of performances reinforce oppressive traditions of the entertainment industry. Jess calls attention to the fact that historically, oppressive traditions of the entertainment industry have led audiences to consume Black women’s performances in ways that deny their subjectivity; *Olio* seeks to counter that reality. This chapter focuses on the Sissieretta Jones section, comprised of ten pages out of a 235-page collection; in this section, Jess alternates fictionalized Works Progress Administration interviews of an imagined stage hand from Jones’s show, Eva Shoe, with poetry written from Sissieretta Jones’s perspective. The alternating, imagined voices of Jones with a fictional character who Jess imagines worked on her show, Eva Shoe, showcase poetry’s potential to theorize Black women’s celebrity through representing exterior material conditions and interiority. Particularly, Jess writes the fictional character Shoe’s perspective in the form of a historically real Works Progress Administration template, while he writes the historically real figure Jones’s perspectives as poetry and re-writings of the song lyrics she sang. In analyzing the combination of music and literature as it manifests in the context of representing Jones, this chapter seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of music’s and literature’s relationship to representing Black women singers.

Highlighting the different subjectivities and experiences of significant African American cultural figures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the “Cast” of *Olio*, in addition to Jones, includes pianist and ragtime composer John William Boone (1864-1927), Henry “Box” Brown (c. 1815-1897) who escaped enslavement in Virginia by mailing himself in a wooden crate to Philadelphia, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), The Fisk Jubilee
Singers, first African-American Broadway producer and performer Ernest Hogan (1865-1909), pianist and ragtime composer Scott Joplin (1867-1917), Millie and Christine Mckoy (1851-1912) who were born conjoined and known as the Carolina Twins, author, orator, and educator Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), piano prodigy Tom Wiggins (1849-1908), African-American minstrel performers Bert Williams (1874-1922) and George Walker (c.1872-1911), and sculptor Edmonia Lewis (1844-1907). Bringing poetic representations of these figures together in this collection, Jess illuminates how navigating institutions including the entertainment, art, and education industries is a raced, gendered, and classed experience.  

Re-Imagining Jones’s Archival Presence through Poetic Form

This chapter stages intersectionality by analyzing how Olio enriches archival representations of African-American women singer-celebrity Jones by highlighting poetry’s potential as a literary form to imagine her resistance to white hegemony by affirming her humanity within the entertainment industry. Combining Lorde’s conceptualization of poetry as a salient way to counter racist/sexist history-making that renders Black women invisible with Patricia Hill Collins’s standpoint theory, I analyze how Jess represents Jones affirms her humanity by articulating the relationship between her talent and subject position. Poet and cultural critic Audre Lorde reflects, “[A]s we come more into touch with our own ancient, non-european (sic) consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power form where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes.”

For Lorde, as a Black woman invested in dismantling power systems that render Black women’s material conditions invisible,

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poetry is necessary because it documents lived experiences, which institutions, as Kimberlé Crenshaw reminds us, fail to “focus on and legitimize.” Lorde asserts that poetry amplifies the “consciousness of living,” “feelings,” and “those hidden sources of power” that institutions including the entertainment industry and historical biography render invisible and mute.

Collins’s standpoint theory, an intersectional methodology which seeks to foreground women of color’s experiences within legal, educational, and employment institutions, calls for the balancing of individual and group perspectives to understand how Black women navigate systems of power through a complex interplay of acquiescing to and resisting oppression:

Individual African-American women have long displayed varying types of consciousness regarding our shared angle of vision. By aggregating and articulating these individual expressions of consciousness, a collective, focused group consciousness becomes possible. Black women’s ability to forge these individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness becomes possible. Black women’s ability to forge these individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women’s survival. As Audre Lorde points out, “it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment.”

*Olio* provides underrepresented perspectives to illustrate the complex power dynamics of reinforcing and resisting oppression. In Jones’s context, she infused the white supremacist practice of minstrelsy with new meaning by having her troupe first perform traditional minstrel songs, then directly following she would perform serious operatic songs to affirm her talent and humanity as a Black woman. Specifically, Jess’s poetry articulates “individual expressions of

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13 In Kimberlé Crenshaw’s article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," the term "intersectionality" highlights institutional failures in focusing on and legitimizing experiences of marginalized identities in legal discourse. She draws a direct connection between legal discourse’s failure and "contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses" that fail to "consider intersectional identities such as women of color" (1242).

Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

consciousness” to illuminate “a collective, focused group consciousness” of Black women singers-celebrities. By articulating the specific struggles of Jones as a Black women singer-celebrity and Shoe as a Black woman stagehand, *Olio* illuminates how their positions impact their power within the racist, sexist, and classist the entertainment industry. These poetry collections illuminate the difficulty Jones and Shoe face in communicating “individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness;” yet, in articulating these challenges, their subjectivity and humanity as Black women within domains of power remains visible and present. The ability to communicate everyday struggles, for Collins, is a means of defining the power dynamics that shape “everyday consciousness;” Jones and Shoe For Black women, even and especially for those who reach celebrity status, self-definition is essential to survival.

Rutter identifies how Jess expands the frame of history-making in his poetry collection *leadbelly* (2004), which represents through poetry musician Huddie Ledbetter’s interactions with exploitative ethnomusicologist John Lomax, as “imagined testimony.”¹⁵ Specifically, Rutter argues that by writing about historical figures such as Ledbetter and “bearing witness to his anger and resentment over being forced to perform the role of the savage savant to satisfy whites’ fears and fantasies,”¹⁶ Jess enacts a form of history making that traditional historical biography cannot. Rutter emphasizes, “Unconstrained by cultural nationalist or white male master narratives…Jess and his contemporaries strive to fill in the historical gaps and silences effaced by these narratives.”¹⁷ Rutter identifies in the Ledbetter-Lomax interaction in *leadbelly*

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¹⁶ Rutter, p. 58.
¹⁷ Rutter, p. 59.
the power of Jess’s work to “uncover the cross-cultural exchanges that have always been a part of the American tradition, while at the same time recognizing the continued need to address the class, race, and gender inequities that underlie these exchanges.”

Jess’s poetry significantly contributes to compiling the “cross-cultural exchanges that have always been a part of the American tradition” by making the interactions between Jones, a historical figure, and Shoe, an imagined figure, within the entertainment industry visible and audible. Jess’s imagining Shoe’s responses to Jones calls attention to the archival reality that Black women’s responses are not as carefully documented or published widely. It would grossly simplify Jones’s and Shoe’s context to say that the cross-cultural exchange is one of class difference, because while Jones and Shoe come from different class backgrounds with Jones wielding the power to have her own stage show, she still died in poverty, and, as Shoe explains had the financial means to create her own stage show, like Jones, as she explains, wielded the power to create her own stage show. The cross-cultural exchange that Jess represents literally by having poetry written from Jones’s perspective, alternating with Shoe’s responses in the form of a Works Progress Administration interview, reflects on the archival world-making that can happen that is necessary to make invisible forces of power and oppression visible. There is more specifically between a Black woman who performs on the stage, and a Black woman who tends to the necessities for that stage to exist; their existences are mutually dependent on each other in ways that “the master’s house” has purposely rendered invisible.

Considering Rutter’s understanding of Jess’s poetry as “imagined testimony,” this section asks how analyzing the poetic representations of two Black women’s perspectives within an exploitative entertainment industry illuminates “class, race, and gender inequities that underlie
these exchanges.” Jess represents a “cross-cultural exchange” between a Black woman performer and a Black woman audience member that has also “always been part of the American tradition.” Yet, as published audience reviews show, Black women’s audience responses to Black women singers is much more understudied than those of exchanges between Black performers and whites who wield financial success within the entertainment industry. My analysis of Jess’s poetry as part of an archive on Black women singer-celebrities complicates and deepens my arguments on how Black women experience oppression and empowerment within the entertainment industry, and further illuminates how poetry, when brought into the archive of Black women singer-celebrities, troubles assumptions about Black women celebrities’ subjectivities. This chapter argues that imagined archival documents in the form of poetry make systems of oppression based on race, class, and gender visible and audible in ways that other historical documents render invisible, as Crenshaw’s definition of intersectionality explains.

In imagining Sissieretta Jones’s experience and resistance within the early twentieth-century entertainment industry that is silent and invisible in the archival record, Jess does an essential form of history making that makes the undocumented realities of power dynamics visible and audible. Drawing upon Emily Rutter’s reading of Jess’s poetic representation of the performer Huddie Ledbetter (known as Leadbelly), I analyze how Jess represents “all aspects of [her] legacy” to argue that his poetic representation of Jones provides a paradigm for staging intersectionality that makes previously invisible and silent aspects of her experiences within the entertainment industry visible and audible. Specifically, I will analyze how Jess imagines Jones’s perspective on the “Black Patti” name compared to what remains in published

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information (through the poem “My Name Is Sissieretta Jones”), and how Jess imagines Jones’s perception of her talent as a singer and identity as a Black woman resisting the minstrel tradition on the stage and affirming her humanity (through the poem “Sissieretta Jones, Carnegie Hall, 1902” subtitled “O patria mia”). In doing so, I argue that through Olio, Jess imagines Jones navigating the tension between perpetuating and challenging the stereotypical, oppressive representations of blackness the minstrel shows showcased. This chapter argues that Jones’s representation in Olio speaks back to and interrogates a racist and sexist popular entertainment industry. Moreover, in de-centering the dominant published perspectives of white reviewers and audiences, this chapter focuses on how as a Black male poet, Jess represents Jones’s perspective to demonstrate the ways in which centering Black women singer-celebrities’ performances illuminates diverse modes of resistance that the entertainment industry renders silent and invisible.

**Whose Performance? Poetry as Pre-Staging Jones**

Even though Jones was a world-famous African-American female soprano, she could not book performances in major venues compared to her white counterparts. In addition to being “gifted, well trained, and fortunate in obtaining good management,” music historian Eileen Southern attributes African-American women concert singers’ careers in the United States, including that of Flora Batson (1864-1906), Nellie Brown Mitchell (1845-1924), and Marie Selika (1849-1937), to white audiences’ “curiosity” about their race. The image and sound of a Black woman concert singer that piqued white audiences’ “curiosity” and opened access for concert singers such as Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield in the nineteenth century had changed by the
end of the nineteenth century; Southern explains that “By the mid-1890s the black prima donna had almost disappeared from the nation’s concerts halls because of lack of public interest.”

In response to Jones’s reality of not being able to access a concert hall to perform concert music, Jones used the vaudeville stage to perform both popular and concert music; and, capitalizing on the “Black Patti” nickname that led to her visibility in the early twentieth century United States performance arena, Jones appropriated the “Black Patti” name for her own show which she formed in the 1890s. Black Patti’s Troubadours, not the only Black touring company of its kind but the most popular, took advantage of the popularity of Black musical comedies, originally called “coon shows,” which re-appropriated the minstrel show in which white performers donned Blackface and performed disparaging stereotypical representations of blackness. Jones sang opera selections and spirituals at the end of her show rather than closing with the typical cakewalk, appropriating the disparaging, popular art form of minstrelsy and injecting her agency and talent to resist stereotypical, oppressive representations of blackness. Her strategy worked. Jones was established as “the star of the troupe, [wore] beautiful dresses and costumes, and [sang] concert and operatic selections of her choosing,” performed “a forty-week season with an income of about five hundred dollars a week, or twenty thousand dollars

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21 According to Lee, “There were at least three African American companies traveling around the country with this kind of show (footnote 10). For example, in the fall of 1895, white manager John W. Isham established the Octoroos (97) company, which performed a three-part show. It began with a one-act farce with song and dance, followed by several vaudeville specialty acts, and finished with “Thirty Minutes around the Operas.” It also included a female chorus and gave leading parts in the show to women. This show was so successful that Isham formed another show in 1896 called Oriental America, which was like the Octoroos but ended with “Forty Minutes of Grand and Comic Opera” (Footnote 11). What the Black Patti Troubadours had that these shows did not was Black Patti—a well-known start whose name and reputation would draw large audiences and ensure the success of Voelckel and Nolan’s venture” (97-8).
annually, which would make her the highest-paid African American entertainer in her time.”

Even though Jones’s career spanned the time that she could have had her voice recorded, there are no known recordings; other than quotes cited in newspapers, her personal opinions and experiences remain largely unknown.

Jess’s book begins with three definitions of the word “olio.” These diverse definitions illuminate the complex power dynamics that encompass historical narrative:

\(a\): a miscellaneous mixture of heterogeneous elements; hodgepodge
\(b\): a miscellaneous collection (as of literary or musical selections)
also: the second part of a minstrel show which featured a variety of performance acts and later evolved into vaudeville.

The reader is embedded in these historical realities. Specifically, the strongest cultural force that Black performers operated within and against was blackface minstrelsy. Fame and celebrity studies’ methodologies necessitates thinking about “outside of and within” the performance, as Jess’s rendering of Jones calls for readers to realize. As Leo Braudy explains, “performers” are, of course, central to analysis, “But,” he continues:

fame and celebrity studies ideally also concentrate on the extra-textual aspect of performance, all the “surround” of the performer that sometimes is in vital response to whatever text is present but just as often is in tension with it, contradicts it, or ignores it. In other words, surround is everything else that the audience pays attention to, in addition to the somewhat circumscribed and formalized performance.

Braudy’s emphasis on the essential interplay of performance and extra-textual aspects to shape celebrity leads us to consider, what extra-textual aspects exist of Jones’s performances and

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shaping of her celebrity? There isn’t much, according to Lee. It is easy to argue in the purview of my project, that Black women singer-celebrities’ access to documenting and circulating the means to shape the “extra-textual” aspects of their performances was limited. Specifically, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s definition of intersectionality highlights the failure for institutions to document financial and legal oppression of Black women. *Olio* is an incredibly rich and complex poetry collection in which sections intentionally blur into each other to emphasize the interconnectedness of African American artists that speak to the past, present, and future.

Jess’s inclusion of multiple definitions of what “olio” highlights the importance of context and understanding how domains of power shape knowledge through inclusion and exclusion; the inclusion of multiple definitions also allows for readers from various subject positions to be reminded of other texts, specifically imagined literary texts and performances, that they might have encountered or will encounter. The first definition is rather general, while the second definition begins to hone in on literature and music. In addition to the first two definitions of “olio,” Jess sharpens this collection’s intended focus with a third definition: “also: the second part of a minstrel show which featured a variety of performance acts and later evolved into vaudeville.” This definition sets readers’ focus for exploring performances of blackness (racist minstrel shows) and Black performers (who performed in racist minstrel shows that Black performers also performed within, as well as their eventual exclusion from vaudeville) as an intertwined, tangled, and complex matrix of resistance and acquiescence to racist, sexist, and classist entertainment institutions. By highlighting the multiplicity of the potential for one word to signify—olio—Jess simultaneously begins to narrow readers’ focus. Beginning this text with multiple definitions of the same word, shifting from seemingly an apolitical definition to a

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definition that defines politically-charged performances of race, Jess also shifts the frame of what history and literature are. Understanding the politics of raced, gendered, and classed performances within the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century entertainment industry, as well as within the twenty-first century publishing industry Jess works within, is essential for readers to understand Black women’s experiences within power domains that insidiously work to render them invisible within the historical record, such as those that he seeks to represent through imagining Eva Shoe. By providing a sociopolitical frame for the reader, Jess encourages reflection on the domains of power in which performances, histories, and biographies document, remember, and shape readers’ understandings.26

Following the opening definitions of “olio,” Jess continues to interrogate the patriarchal, racist, and classist traditions of the entertainment industry by including the “Introduction or Cast or Owners of This Olio.”27 Jess amplifies the differences between Black and white audiences that consumed the African-American musicians’ and singers’ performances. The multiplicity of labelling here mirrors the three definitions Jess sets forth at the beginning of the text, and highlights that even an apolitical term such as “introduction” is charged with political significance. Linking “introduction” and “cast” to ownership is a significant connection that

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26 Based on Jess’s framing of reader as performer, the ideal way to analyze *Olio* would include a chorus of readers, listeners, and speakers sifting through Jess’s imagined artifacts on Sissieretta Jones and collectively discussing the text—my chorus would include students of color who navigate micro and macro aggressions, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, my mentor and dissertation director Dr. Kathy Glass, dissertation committee members Dr. Faith Barrett and Dr. Laura Engel, students who have asked me what *Lemonade* has to do with them, singers Janelle Monáe, Belcalis Almanzar, Robyn Rihanna Fenty, my mentors Dr. Emily Rutter and Dr. Anissa Wardi, Oprah Winfrey, and others who this brain trust would suggest. We’d read through and discuss. I’d transcribe and analyze that epic discussion considering how power dynamics manifest to understand the material conditions in which participants experience Black women celebrities, and the impact of the past on the present.

must continue to be made in the context of Black performers wielding creative and financial agency, as closely reading Greenfield’s contractual and musical documents has shown us. Jess’s “Introduction or Cast or Owners of This Olio” list includes many Black performers from the nineteenth and twentieth century, including Sissieretta Jones who was a Black woman celebrity born three years after Greenfield’s death in 1867.

“Introduction or Cast or Owners of This Olio” theorizes history and knowledge-making as performance by making explicit that words and histories can be read in different directions and ways which leads to inevitable exclusion and inclusion, visibility and invisibility, audibility and muteness. The speaker’s description of Sissieretta Jones reveals a multiplicity of subject positions that counters the seemingly coherent and objective narrative of a performance program; this description highlights the complex material realities that Jones navigated within the entertainment industry. Her description begins with her name, birth and death dates—“Sissieretta Jones (1868-1933)”—followed by another tongue-in-cheek description that speaks back to the racist entertainment industry: “They dubbed her ‘Black Patti.’ We thrall her Miss Jones. Hailing from Providence, the first Black Diva to croon in Carnegie. Led a worldwide tour of her eponymous Troubadours from 1896-1916.”28 The description highlights the multiplicity of audiences that traditional program notes take in to account; in other words, this description makes explicit the power dynamics between white and Black audiences that constitute what is popular and successful in the entertainment industry. “They” highlights the racist entertainment industry’s identification of Jones in relation to Italian opera singer Adelina Patti, denying her individuality and subjectivity and instead making her into an object of celebrity (like Greenfield

had experienced with being labelled the “Black Swan”) while “We” amplifies those who respect her individuality, specifically, Black audiences historically ignored in published reviews by white writers. Although she was born in Portsmouth, Virginia, this description sets her origin as “Hailing from Providence,”29 where she trained at the Providence Academy of Music and the New England Conservatory of Music, and where she died, at Providence, Rhode Island. The description holds up her credentials as being the first Black woman to sing at Carnegie Hall, and that she led her own group of performers in a tour for twenty years. This introduction highlights the racist entertainment institutions by labelling “They,” keeping itself open to later fleshing out Jones’s experience as a Black woman singer-celebrity who died, from cancer, in poverty.

“Introduction or Cast or Owners of this Olio” opens possibilities for reading Black performers’ within the entertainment industry in the period between the end of the Civil War and World War I to illuminate their lack of social power and resistance through performance. Situating Jones within and among other performers across different art forms and subjectivities amplifies the differences, and in highlighting difference, pushes back against homogenizing institutions that deny African-American artists individuality and/or presence. After introducing the characters, the cast list demands the reader to “Fix your eyes on the flex of these first-generation-freed voices: They coalesce in counterpoint, name nemeses, summon tongue to witness. Weave your own chosen way between these voices…”30 After focusing on Greenfield as one of the first Black women singers who rose to celebrity status in the 1850s, we’re left to wonder what does “free” mean to the poetic persona/historical compiler of this collection? What is the rubric for Jess/the poetic persona/historical compiler to pinpoint Jones as an origin of

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29 Jess, Olio, p. 2.
30 Jess, Olio, p. 3.
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“freed” Black women voices? By imagining Jones’s and Shoe’s responses to their experiences within the entertainment system that are not included in existing archives and historical representations, this collection raises awareness of the absences and exclusions it creates in fostering presence and inclusion. This text also represents ideological scripts of Black women’s identities and histories, interrogating who gets to determine those scripts, and how acquiescing to and challenging those scripts isn’t necessarily documented, but are forms of resistance to systems of oppression based on race, class, and gender.

Jess includes a lot of information before we get to Jones’s representation, which reflects the reality of the elusiveness of Black women singer-celebrities in archival materials about them. First, Jones’s section begins with a drawing; the mise-en-scène includes a view standing behind the outline of a singing woman with a spotlight shining down on her.
The reader’s and singer’s view faces a sea of an audience. This image aligns the reader with the performer’s experience, highlighting the interconnectedness of, and tension between, performer and audience. While this image acknowledges the interpersonal domain of power between “the world” or racist entertainment institutions and Jones, Jess also shifts attention to the interpersonal domain of power between two Black women.

Archiving Identity and Performance in “My Name Is Sissieretta Jones”

Jones’s first enters Olio through the poem “My Name Is Sissieretta Jones,” in which Jess imagines Jones speaking back to the entertainment industry she navigated, reflecting on the power of naming:

> Once word got out about the way I sing, the world wanted to bleed all the sass out my name. To scratch out the gift my mother gave me and shove a would-be white diva in my spotlight. They couldn’t imagine the colored in coloratura standing on its own onstage, so they claimed I was just part of Adelina Patti’s chorus. They stuck me beneath her name, a shadow sentenced to the borders of her light, called me Black Patti.

“They,” or, “the world,” that Jones identifies is the racist and sexist entertainment industry that held Jones up in comparison to her European contemporary, Patti, rather than allowing Jones to exist as an individual singer-celebrity. Maureen D. Lee’s extensive biographical research on Jones includes an 1897 advertising fliers for the Black Patti Troubadours which literally shows that “Black Patti” was listed first, and then, directly underneath, her name in parenthesized, small, italicized letters: (Mme. M. Sissieretta Jones). While published reviews and audiences, as well as her managers Rudolph Voelckel and John Nolan who “used advertising fliers to publicize” the show labelled Jones as “Black Patti,” here, Jess provides insight into how Jones

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34 Lee, p. 108.
might have interpreted the entertainment industry’s efforts to deny her humanity. Even though we can never know Jones’s opinion on the “Black Patti” nickname besides her published quote, Jess represents how the “Black Patti” name rendered her invisible in plain sight. The naming sought to “bleed” all of Jones’s individuality by shaping her singer-celebrity status in relation to a European counterpart. Jones explains the irony that encompasses language and power in juxtaposing “colored” with “coloratura.” Jones is a Black woman singer-celebrity, and is a talented person both because of and regardless of her race; Jess represents the complex relationship between race, identity, and talent. Finally, Jones literally describes how her identification with the entertainment industry worked, literally “[sticking her] beneath her name, a shadow sentenced to the borders of her light.” Jones’s imagined perspective articulates a way she could have understood the popular entertainment industry rendering her existence in relation to her white counterpart.

While Jones first describes how the entertainment industry rendered her visible only in relation to her European counterpart, conveying her experience creates a visibility that exists and endures to resist the consequences of the entertainment industry. Jones continues:

But the darkened sense inside my name won’t be silenced. With its sister and shush gospel of ocean, I sing each night from the way I’d stand on the docks of Providence, a straggle-boned bundle of lungs and tremble lifting wave after wave into wave after wave of Atlantic. Its applause keeled over me, calling me with its bell of salt, its belly of sunken hulls, its blue green fathoms of tremolo. Every night, in the dark offstage, I hear my mother’s voice in my head, her backyard hum, the sea in her distance with the weather of storm. She’d look out and see the thrall of water heave its back to the sky. I’d look out to the darkness and hear my true name.35

Claiming and amplifying “the darkened sense inside [her] name,” can be read as a metaphor for her history and identity tied to the name her mother gave her and signals her racial identity.

35 Jess, Olio, p. 156.
Jones’s reclamation of her name entails centering the concert stage where audiences heard her talent and relegating comparisons to her European counterpart “in the dark offstage.” Jess imagines Jones’s perspectives that occur both when she’s on and offstage, but not made visible or audible. Jess imagines Jones “on the docks of Providence” to summon and reanimate the “sister and shush” of her name, Sissieretta that the “Black Patti” name replaced. “Sister and shush” are fluid sounds that summon the water and place from Providence, where (although she was not originally from there) she cultivated her musical talents. The sounds of “sister and shush” reanimate the blood that she explains was drained from her name by the entertainment industry. The “sass” that the racist entertainment industry tried to “bleed” out of her name by comparing her to Patti gains life from the fluid sounds of “sister and shush” that also remind listeners of the Atlantic Ocean. Here, Jess summons Jones’s individual history as a way of understanding how she to sustained herself; Jones resists the racist entertainment industry that attempts to disassociate and alienate Jones from her body, name, and history.

**Re-Writing Lyrics as Resistant Poetry in “Sissieretta Jones, Carnegie Hall, 1902, O patria mia”**

Inspired by the broader tendency in contemporary literature to depict Black women singers' diverse modes of resistance through imagined subjectivity, this section analyzes argues that through the re-writing of song lyrics as poetry that Jones performs, Jess represents Jones’s diverse experiences reinforcing and resisting the oppressive expectations perpetuated by the minstrelsy tradition in the United States. Jess’s “Sissieretta Jones, Carnegie Hall, 1902,” subtitled “O patria mia,” an aria from Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Aida*, re-writes the song lyrics as poetry to amplify Jones’s raced and gendered experience as a Black woman performing at Carnegie Hall. Jess grounds the readers’ perceptions of historical reality with the poem “Sissieretta Jones,
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Carnegie Hall, 1902,” subtitled “O patria mia.”

What did it mean for Jones to be singing the character of Aida as a Black woman in the United States in 1902, even before the curtain rose and she began to sing? It meant that performance was fraught with the history of a nation that provided Black women singers visibility under the conditions of being framed as less-than their white woman counterparts. At the same time, historically, this was not the first time that Jones performed at Carnegie Hall. In fact, according to Lee, in the inaugural year of Black Patti’s Troubadours, “Jones took a one-night break from her new Troubadours on Monday, 12 October 1896, to sing a concert at Carnegie Hall with two other great African American prima donnas, Marie Selika and Flora Batson Bergen. The event, the Zion Grand Centennial Jubilee Concert and Banquet, was advertised as the first public appearance of these three leading black concert singers.”

_Olio_ both seeks to correct historical absences, but also interrogate assumptions about historical truth and knowledge-building; by manipulating information and time, this poem clearly presents itself as an imagined, creative understanding of Jones rather than masquerading as truth; regardless, this poem speaks to the past, present, and future experiences of African American women concert singers embedded within racist, classist, and sexist entertainment industries.

In re-writing the lyrics to “O Patria Mia,” Jess’s poem reanimates a significant moment in the archive when a Black woman was singing a character historically performed by white women in blackface. I draw upon Naomi André’s methodology of envisioning “black opera” as “an

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37 Lee, p. 103-4.
important starting point for how we can reinvent a term to include new voices, narratives, and experiences.” While André’s focus is on contemporary opera performances, her emphasis to “discuss a historical context and political directive for having black voices telling their own stories and becoming full participants in a genre that had been closed through segregation” illuminates how Jess uses poetic form to re-animate a performance by bringing together the song lyrics that represent Jones’s experience within the entertainment industry, and expand an archive of performance, and all of the political realities that performance entails.  

In the context of Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Aida*, the title character bids farewell to her home, Ethiopia, in the aria “O patria mia.” As a captive in Egypt, Aida anticipates she will never return home. In the translated lyrics of this aria, Aida first explains that “if you [Radames] come to give me, so cruel, / your last goodbye, / the dark vortex of the Nile/ will be my grave and perhaps, give me peace, / and perhaps give me peace and oblivion.” She threatens committing suicide by the water. Moving from her individual pain as a captive in Egypt whose love is betrothed to another, she has no hope of ever returning to Ethiopia. Aida continues:

> Oh my homeland, I will never see you again!
> No more! never see you again!
> Oh blue skies and gentle breezes of my village
> Where the calm morning shone
> O green hills and perfumed shores
> O my homeland, I will never see you again!
> No more! no, no, never again, never again!


39 André draws on the experiences of performers and audiences to explore this music’s resonance with today's listeners. Interacting with creators and performers, as well as with the works themselves, André reveals how black opera unearths suppressed truths. These truths provoke complex, if uncomfortable, reconsideration of racial, gender, sexual, and other oppressive ideologies. Opera, in turn, operates as a cultural and political force that employs an immense, transformative power to represent or even liberate. Viewing opera as a fertile site for critical inquiry, political activism, and social change, *Black Opera* lays the foundation for innovative new approaches to applied scholarship.
Oh cool valleys, and blessed refuge
What a promise to me by my love
Now that the dream of love has vanished
O my homeland, I will not see you again.
Oh my homeland, I will never see you again!⁴⁰

As an Ethiopian woman character, Aida expresses the pain of a lost homeland that resonates historically with the African and African-American experience of being stolen across the Atlantic Ocean and forced into chattel slave labor. Aida’s experience as represented in these lyrics echoes throughout Black women singer-celebrities’ artistry encompassing Greenfield’s, Hopkins’s, the character of Dianthe’s, Jones, and even later singers including African-American opera singer Leontyne Price. While Verdi’s original lyrics can be read as a representation of Black women’s reality in the United States as descendants of slaves brought from Africa, Jess’s poem “O Patria Mia” is an “imagined testimony” that contextualizes Jones within her specific context as a Black woman singer in the twentieth century.

Jess’s representation of Jones’s perspective illuminates her experience of race, identity, and talent; specifically, artistically and strategically Jones performs the character of Aida, which is impacted by her experience as a Black woman. Jess opens this poem within the context of the opera itself; an unidentified poetic persona explains: “Aida, buried in the darkness / of her fate. Aida, singing / in the tomb of her lover.”⁴¹ The poem continues into a process of redefining and resituating Jones within the context of “Carnegie Hall, 1902”:

Her lover a notion pale as
the aria circling from her mouth.
Aida, lowered into the pit
Cloaked in breath’s ocean,
a war inside her voice.

⁴¹ Jess, Olio, p. 158.
A battle of tongues sung doloroso,
The husk of shadow on air.\textsuperscript{42}

The poetic persona describes the “aria” Jones sings as “pale” which calls attention to the blackness of her “mouth” and body. “My Name Is Sissieretta Jones” provides a way to read the ocean as a safe, comforting place as well as a place underpinned with painful memories of the triangular trade route and enslavement that established institutionally-sanctioned exploitation and commodification of Black bodies. History underpins the “war” inside Jones’s voice, as the United States culture and entertainment industry that she performs within still institutionally-sanctions exploitation of Black performers. In singing Italian opera as a Black woman, Jones experiences the tension of a “battle of tongues” encompassing her Black body while singing “pale” Italian music with her voice. Yet, Jess imagines Jones as perceiving this tension in terms of agency. This tension is one of “those hidden sources of power from where our true knowledge and lasting action comes,” as Lorde emphasizes in her reflections on poetry, because this poem argues that Aida’s character was never realized until Jones performed it onstage. Jess represents a new form of knowledge-creation and world-building that honors Jones’s performance in a way that traditional concert notes cannot. Jones has the artistic talent to realize this character more powerfully than any white woman singer before her had; not to say that she could only perform this character because she was a Black woman. While Jones didn’t, and arguably couldn’t, publicize her struggles with identity and performance, this poem imagines that struggle considering her historical reality.

\textsuperscript{42} Jess, \textit{Olio}, p. 158.
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Jess represents Jones’s individual and historio-social performance context through re-writing the “O Patria Mia” lyrics. Specifically, through the repetition of “with” Jones communicates all the facets of her identity and history:

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With the soar of her father’s
sermon for truth. With the burn
of nigger heaven. With the hum
of oceans wrapped in bone.
With the legacy of bones
wrapped in ocean. With a national
healing hogtied to song.⁴³
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This stanza continues to connect Aida’s situation with the many cultural signifiers that situate Jones within her own socio-political context. For instance, “the soar of her father’s/ sermon for truth” connects to and honors Jones’s father, Jeremiah Malachi Joyner, who was an African Methodist Episcopal Minister as part of her history. The burning pain that the line articulates encompasses the historical realities of oppressive mental and physical violence inflicted upon Black people in the United States. The “healing” the persona articulates isn’t healing at all, as “hogtied” signifies “tying limbs together, rendering subject immobile and helpless.” Identifying these historical and individual realities renders these contextual details of Jones’s life visible, articulating the “true knowledge and lasting action” that Lorde suggests poetry allows for. Both acknowledging and honoring Jones’s identity and history does not feed into a stereotype about the “natural” musicality of Black people that circulated in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries; instead, her identity and history is a part of and enhances her artistry. Learning about Jones’s sociohistorical context could compel the reader to continue to reflect on how the entertainment industry intentionally shows and hides Black humanity.

“Sissieretta Jones, Carnegie Hall, 1902, O patria mia” makes the socio-historical realities of this cultural text/poem/imagined witness explicit, which reveals the multi-faceted purposes of this performance for readers, audiences, and listeners. Repetition shifts from “with” to “let,” as the perspective shifts from the unidentified poetic persona to first person; Jess represents the encompassing artistry of Jones embodying herself, and performing the Aida character with artistic skill. At this juncture, Jones says: “Let me hum it to you sweet / With vivace; let me scrape it into / our history.” Jones as the speaker, performing as Aida, refers to all of the preceding information about the conflict of her history, identity, and talent as well as the oppressive history of the United States as “it.” Through poetry, Jess performs on the page, showing how Jones could “scape” those material realities into history. While “O patria mia” is a slow, sorrowful song, the persona wants to hum these realities with “vivace,” the musical term for lively, very quick, and upbeat. As the poetic persona represented with temporary control here, Jones pushes against the limitations of the song’s form by using the “tools” of musical notation to change the seemingly mournful tone of commemorating a history of oppression into an artist’s strategic choice to represent information in a lively way. Jones scrapes “our history,” the history of Black women singers, not for the comfort of white listeners, but for the project of continuing to expand the historical record on Black women’s experiences and artistic strategies.

Throughout this cultural text/poem/imagined witness, Jess highlights that Jones was a Black woman singing “O patria mia” to imagine what Jones imagined she was accomplishing by singing this aria. Repetition shifts from “let” to “I” in the beginning of the poem’s following lines which highlights the fluid movement between Jones’s artistic choices which “let” a performance of a character happen. Throughout the re-writing of the “O patria mia” lyrics, Jones

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44 Jess, *Olio*, p. 158.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

articulates her artistic intent, which is difficult to document within the performance context of an opera where one plays a character. Jones claims her individuality and subjectivity by connecting herself with the character and struggles of Aida, rather than the struggles of “Black Patti.” In singing the opera, she was not upholding a Euro-centric, white supremacist ideal, rather Jones was connecting with Aida’s struggles as a Black woman within an oppressive system. Jones complexly articulates her own lived experience:

I stand solo in this country of concert. I am multitudes of broken chains. I am Aida with war on her lips. I am Aida against drowning In all that summons her alive. I bear the crescendo of ocean inside me. I carry its bones inside my attack. I am a wave reaching beyond this shore.45

As a Black woman singer-turned-celebrity, Jones articulates her reality as a Black woman singer navigating a racist and sexist entertainment industry, and, in turn, brings the character of Aida truly to life for the first time; she is an individual who has achieved fame. In owning and articulating who she, a Black woman whose experiences within the entertainment system are raced, gendered, and classed, Jones illuminates her complex resistance in the face of the oppressive industry. The ocean is both everything that oppresses her, and everything that empowers and can liberate her; the ocean is a way of thinking about Black female celebrity.

This poem showcases a process of becoming; throughout the poem Jones identifies the socio-political context she inhabits that historical oppression underpins. Identifying and exploring this reality allows for liberation. After moving rapidly through a fluid understanding of

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herself within an industry which oppresses her and what has the potential to empower her, this poem ends returning to repetition of “let”:

Let this belting be our unbinding. Let o bring the sound of all our wanting. Let patria speak the names Of all my fathers. Let the curtain rise to show the face that is known. Let the country be mine. Let the country be mine. Let this country be mine. Let this country be mine.  

The poem ends with a call for “unbinding” a “national healing hogtied to song.” This re-writing of the opera lyrics, which Jess imagines Jones calling a “husk of shadow on air,” articulates the complexities and material conditions that Jones’s performance of Aida does not render visible or audible; or, did it render visibly and audibly and just does not translate into the archival record? The poem’s ending also calls for a widening of the frame of the historical record itself, calling to acknowledge “all our wanting” and “all my fathers” to “[l]et this country be mine.” At the end of the poem, Jess make Jones’s performance not just one of art, but of citizenship. Just as Jones repetitively voices “let” to showcase her various artistic choices Jones enacted in her skillful performance, Jones ends with a call for reclaiming ownership in a country that excluded and oppressed, and arguably still excludes and oppresses, Black women, even if they achieve celebrity status.

Imagining Jones’s Artistic Mastery in “Sissieretta Jones, ad libitum” and “Sissieretta Jones & The Black Patti Troubadours, Forte/Grazioso”

“Sissieretta Jones, ad libitum,” which translates to “Sissieretta Jones, at or according to one’s pleasure,” further deepens the historical record by imagining the ways in which Jones understands her artistry and experiences of her own oppression and empowerment. In this poem, Jones explains,

I sing this body ad libitum, Europe scraped raw between my teeth until, presto, Ave Maria floats to the surface from a Tituba tributary of Swanee. Until I’m a legato darkling whole note, my voice shimmering up from the Atlantic’s hold; until I’m a coda of sail song whipped in salted wind; until my chorus swells like a lynched tongue; until the nocturnes boiling beneath the roof of my mouth extinguish each burning cross. I sing this life in testimony to tempo rubato, to time stolen body by body by body from one passage to another; I sing tremolo to the opus of loss. I sing this story staccato and strepito, a fugue of blackface and blued-up arias. I sing with one hand smoldering in the steely canon, the other lento, slow, languorous; lingered in the fields of Babylon’s Falling…

For Jones, singing is oppressive and empowering. This testimony begins by making clear that Jones “sings” her body at the pleasure of others, not her own; “Europe scraped raw between my teeth” signifies the European music that she sings, yet as a Black woman her performance illuminates that her understanding of her voice, and all the national and racial identities tied to music, is fluid. The references to Mascagni’s “Ave Maria,” Foster’s “Swanee,” and the African-American spiritual “Babylon’s Falling” situate Jones within a history that encompasses many musical styles including opera, blackface minstrelsy, and African-American spirituals. Jones

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47 Jones’s Black Patti’s Troubadours performances first included three segments, reflecting traditional minstrel shows, called “At Jolly ‘Coon-ey’ Island,” “Songs and Those Who Sang Them,” and “Vaudeville Olio Performers.” The fourth section, “The Operatic Kaleidoscope” was the only segment in which Jones performed; this segment included classical music in contrast to the traditional minstrel songs in the first three segments. Specifically, Mascagni’s “Ave Maria” was the first song in the segment, sung by the chorus. The first song listed in the program that Jones would perform solo is Verdi’s “Il Trovatore” from “La Traviata” (Lee, p. 111).

48 Jess, Olio, p. 162.
juxtaposes all of them within her concert program choices, and that Jess shapes in his imagined presentation of her commentary on her concert program choices.

In another imagined testimony, “Sissieretta Jones & The Black Patti Troubadours, Forte/Grazioso,” Jones’s reaffirms her perspective by reconciling her racial identity and talent, both taking up and troubling the assumptions about the “naturalness” of Black talent. Specifically, this poem articulates shows what empowerment looks and sounds like with Jones wielding her masks:

*Forte*—with *force* was the will that overtook me, that freed my throat and lit my mouth to music. *Forte* was each wave of song, *forte* like my father’s choir of freedmen, sometimes wavered and off key, sometimes pitched in more fear than light, but always *forte*, hurling what voice was left to them into the cauldrone of church air after lifetimes singing their spirituals in secret. They sang *forte* like the stevedores’ shout from ship to shore, crate after crate of cargo burdened into the holds, their gandy opera bouncing off hulls, *forte* in the *grazioso* of their motion, the all-together swing of arm and hand and rope and hoisted weight, *grazioso* onto decks all braced for storm, all blessed with prayer from each Providence pulpit, prayed over from bow to stern, blessings from the community cry of each church, all *grazioso* with hands raised in testimony. I hear them each night, *forte* when I stand on our prow of stage from town to town, port to port, captain of this ragtag ship of blackfaced, cakewalking fools and balladeers, teaching crowds *grazioso* under spotlights with each ticket sold. *Forte* is the cry of the barker bundling each crowd with the smooth-talk promise: darkie entertainment with a touch of high-class classical. *Forte* is the finale each night, *grazioso* is the closing curtain, the unmasking of unpainted faces, the darkened lamplight, the applause fading like the hush of receding surf that carries us on through the night, the ocean of audience rising and falling with each wave of season, *grazioso* is the sail of our bodies in their wind.⁴⁹

Jones situates herself within a context of other performers, both contemporary in her troupe, as well as historical performers who sang their “spirituals in secret.” The repetition of “*forte,*” strong and forceful, and “*grazioso,*” graceful and flowing, throughout this section encompasses Jones’s voice and body, as well as other performers’ voices and bodies. She imagines a community of performers in which she situates herself as a Black woman celebrity who

experiences literal solitude in her unique position. This poem emphasizes the importance of understanding the history that you inherit, and being able to use it rather than letting it overwhelm you. She realizes that she must wield whatever mask she needs to gracefully weather the “ocean of audience rising and falling” and achieve success.

**Sissieretta Jones & Eva Shoe: A Dialogue on Black Women & the Entertainment Industry**

Jones’s navigation of the early twentieth-century entertainment industry in the United States becomes reanimated by the fictional representation of Eva Shoe, an African-American woman who worked for her. While Jones, like Greenfield, has historically been referred to by her agnomen “Black Patti,” *Olio* resituates Jones in relation to Shoe rather than Patti. Shoe’s Works Progress Administration interview opens the section. In her interview, which the document specifies as “(unedited),” Shoe explains:

> I run my own show now. But back in the day I used to work for Black Patti. I got on with her troupe ‘cause I know how to twist myself into knots until most people can’t tell where I begin or end. Folks used to throw pennies for applause and I’d have the floor shining in copper. Don’t bend quite ‘xactly like that no more. But back in the day, like I said, folks used to line up for blocks to see all of us. The mighty Black Patti Revue. Each one of the crowd wantin to see her belt it out the way the white folks would do—even better. All that pearly white song flowin out that pretty black skin, all that European sound spillin out that Ethiopian river of a throat. There was quite a few fellows wanted to proposition her, dreaming about how they’d wake up to hear history in their bed every morning, a history they wanted to own past the skin they lived in. But she wasn’t much feelin any kind of special from them. She was mostly caught up in the truth she was workin out of each note. She wanted to resurrect all the church she could muster out of those opera stories. She wanted to muscle arias out all those spirituals.\(^50\)

Shoe provides insight into her experience within Jones’s show, “The mighty Black Patti Revue”; specifically, Shoe explains that she used her own body on the stage to make a living. Shoe then shifts to her perception of Jones’s experience, both on the stage and in her personal life. Shoe’s perception of Jones’s “pearly white song…European sound” flowing out of “pretty black skin”

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\(^{50}\) Jess, *Olio*, p. 155.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

imagines the voice and the body as separate, with the body not necessarily having any power over the voice although they are inevitably intertwined. Shoe’s description complicates her own characterization of Jones’s body and voice, as she describes that Jones was a talented singer who was passionate about her craft, not just naturally talented simply because of a divine force, or simply because of her race. While Jone’s talent was understood by audiences in comparison to her white counterpart, Jess’s representation also shows that Jones’s talent manifested in her own articulations of history and identity: “in the truth she was workin out of each note…[resurrecting] all the church she could muster.”

While “O patria mia” articulates a complex context of navigating identity and history within a racist and sexist entertainment industry, Shoe interjects following “O patria mia” to provide her perspective. Specifically, Shoe explains the material realities Jones navigated as a Black woman in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Of course, even when she did belt out some opera born outside of this country’s peculiar history, she’d still have to come right back down and weave her way out of the cakewalk of blackface and jim crow. Every evening, she’d waltz all proper out of the spotlight—and then let the okie doke shuffle and that coontalk grin take over the stage. You know—the circus they was all comin to see. All of ‘em—black and white and every shade in between—came because of her name, wanting to see the famous Black Patti herself. And just about as many stayed on to feel the glow of those minstrel shines. What is a coon show, anyway, but one poor devil putting on a mask another devil willin to pay to see?

Shoe explains the historical, institutionally-perpetuated audience expectations intertwined with Black performers and blackface. However, she also adds another complicated layer of the material conditions in which Jones performed: Jones “let the okie doke shuffle and that coontalk grin take over the stage” for “black and white and every shade in between” to watch. In interview

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form, Shoe articulates a complex audience context in which Jones sang both European opera and minstrel songs and achieved success because of it.

While “Sissieretta Jones, ad libitum” represents Jones’s perspective on her artist choices, Shoe interjects again to provide her perspective on Jones’s business and artistic choices. In conversation with Jones’s imagined testimonies, Shoe theorizes the ways in which Jones understands her identity as a Black woman celebrity:

See. Sissie would know how to let folks into one mask and out through another. She’d even raise a toast to the mask, jokin about whether folk—black and white—really believed that the opera was wearing her as a mask, or if it just tickled them to see her putting on that white mask of Vivaldi. *Was it her voice or someone else’s?* they’d seem to ask. Well, it was all her. Every note, in whiteface or blackface or in just plain old American, went straight down to her bones. That’s what I heard when I truly listened, anyway. She’d pour those opera songs all over her body and then dress herself in the church flock of hymns. She told me one time, that in order to hear her true voice, she’d had to ask herself about her own masks. *What kind of mask might I have on?* she said. *Because let me tell you, most don’t even know they’re wearing a mask.* You’ve got to know which masks, how many masks you’re wearing before you can put it down and see your true self. *Those that do, they know just how to slide in and out of it, how to make the world spin inside it and out of it. How to spread their song all over that mask and make it one with the world, no matter how thick or thin the truth in that song might be.*

Shoe’s insight exemplifies Black women theorizing domains of power in conversation with assumptions of artistry in the opera world. Specifically, Shoe explains how “folk—black and white” perceived Jones’s voice and body as separate. However, Shoe explains that “Every note…went straight down to her bones.” Reading Shoe’s understanding of Jones’s performance context in relation to Hopkins’s understanding of Greenfield’s “angel’s voice” within a “casket ebony-bound” illuminates understandings of Black women singer-celebrities over time. Collins and Bilge’s intersectional methodology emphasizes the necessity to “understand power relations through a lens of mutual construction.”

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52 Jess, *Olio*, p. 163.
“masks,” within a racist and sexist entertainment industry to achieve financial and artistic success. Jones explains to Shoe that the masks can be forced but there’s a “hidden source of power,” to use Lorde’s phrase, in knowing how to use the mask, and not to let the mask overwhelm you. Jones’s “lasting action” comes from knowing how to use the masks she has, as a Black woman navigating a racist and sexist entertainment industry, to empower herself in the way she sees best.

Shoe’s response to Jones isn’t judgmental; instead, she frames Jones’s theorizations of her experience in these imagined testimonies as knowledge-building and as part of her artistic and creative resistance strategies. As her interview continues, Shoe explains what she learned from Jones as a Black woman singer-turned-celebrity-turned-show owner:

That’s what I learned from the great Sissieretta Jones. How to know where the mask begins and you end. How to balance the world on edge just between that mask and you, until the mask melts away into the mirage. Took what she taught me and then I moved on. I’d saved up all those pennies from the crowds to buy me a proper little horse and wagon and a proper little medicine-show stage to haul around the country. You know, I named it after a sign—what my plantation-born daddy and his daddy was chasin and what we all stil after. That North Star. We the North Star Travelin Negro Troubadours. You should come on and see us when we roll through your town.54

Identity shapes the way institutions oppress and empower; however, Jones exemplifies that as a Black woman she used her knowledge of the institutions she navigated to empower herself. Knowing “where the mask begins and you end” is necessary since the mask has the potential to shape your understanding of yourself in oppressive or empowering ways. Shoe explains how she herself used the masks to make money, buy property, and put on her own show.

Taking the text’s material format into consideration, and reflecting on Jones’s section in the larger context of the full text reveals the diverse resistance strategies various Black

54 Jess, Olio, p. 165.
performers and writers enacted. For instance, letters pertaining to Lottie Joplin’s financial situation after her husband, ragtime king Scott Joplin’s death, surround the section that focuses on imagined testimonies of Sissieretta Jones and Works Progress Administration interviews of Eva Shoe, revealing the necessity to reflect on the accessible and inaccessible “surround” of their performances. Zooming out further, surrounding, pages fold out with data lists on lynching, and the reasons that Black people were lynched; these social forces and events are intertwined, and accepting that complexity is essential to understanding the complex power dynamics that make up the relationships between Black performers and their material realities that Jess represents in *Olio*. Jones’s section is unique in that it imagines how Jones and Shoe, as Black women with different statuses in the entertainment industry of the early twentieth century, work through continuing to define themselves and their standpoints to foster artistic and financial success.

Reading history by illuminating Black women’s experiences fosters a more nuanced understanding of how domains of power impact material conditions; coming from an intersectional lens that understands that financial, legal, entertainment, and educational institutions of power render Black women’s experiences invisible and mute makes the necessity of digging into various representations of history including those texts which aren’t widely published and canonized even more urgent. Jess uses a blend of formats, both poetry and play script, to evoke voice and embodiment, both of which are not traditional formats that document historical information about performers. Jess shows how taking fictional works into account for performers who we do not have direct access to their perspectives can render experiences visible and audible, and expand the frame of what documenting and remembering looks like and illuminate the complexity of Black women singer-celebrities as complex subjects.
As this project has explored thus far, the performances of Greenfield, Hopkins, and Jones both on the stage and the page show how they strategically make artistic choices that combine their history, identity, and talent. Specifically, the origins, affiliations, and milestones that shape historical narrative perpetuate the visibility of whiteness and invisibility of Blackness. In short, dominant historical narratives that reinforce inequitable power relations are one of the “tools of a racist patriarchy” used to build and uphold what Lorde famously identifies as “the master’s house.” Other tools that Lorde pinpoints—that enrich our understandings of Black women singer-celebrities’ experiences beyond existing published reviews and histories—include patriarchal models of understanding women’s roles in the world as binary, either/or, that sever meaningful, interdependent connections between women. Patriarchal, racist, and sexist models of understanding women hinder everyone, including women, from seeing “difference…as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.” Just as Greenfield and Jones were compared to their white women counterparts, they were denied difference and individuality that would celebrate their talent as unique and different, which they most definitely were in their singing range and style. But reviews by white writers upheld “the master’s house” by relentlessly comparing Greenfield and Jones to their white counterparts; consequently, “the master’s tools,” as Lorde famously proclaimed in 1984, “will never dismantle the master’s house.” Jones’s representation in *Olio* showcases ways to imagine how Jones made her differences strengths. In imagining conversations between Jones and Shoe about their experiences and power dynamics, *Olio* provides representations of African-American women’s responses to the entertainment industry of the mid-nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, calling

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56 Lorde, p. 110.
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

attention to and illuminating Greenfield’s absent responses, and further contextualizing Hopkins’s response through her representation of Dianthe Lusk.
Chapter 4: Beyoncé Knowles-Carter

_I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance._¹

—Sojourner Truth

_I have come to understand my body as an argument, a site of proof and contention._²

—Morgan Parker

_I am accepting of who I am. I will continue to explore every inch of my soul and every part of my artistry._³

—Beyoncé Knowles-Carter

In her article, “Beyoncé’s ‘Homecoming’: Why the opera world should take notes,” opera scholar Naomi André draws a historical line from Marian Anderson’s history-making performance on the National Mall in Washington on April 9, 1939 to Beyoncé Knowles-Carter’s history-making performances at Coachella music festival on April 14 and 21, 2018.⁴ While Knowles-Carter’s performance was “of course, not an opera performance,” André explains that “it was operatic in scope and power.” Although, looking back into Knowles-Carter’s prolific oeuvre, which this chapter will explore, we can see and hear that her performances have always been operatic in cope and power. Born September 4, 1981 in Houston, Texas, Beyoncé Giselle

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Knowles-Carter performed in singing competitions as a child, was the lead singer of the group Destiny’s Child in the late 1990s, and began her solo career in 2003 to become arguably the most famous contemporary singer-celebrity in the United States.

Considering Knowles-Carter’s performances exemplify what celebrities studies scholar Leo Braudy refers to as the “complex economic world in which that possessed self can be variously marketed,” this chapter analyzes the music videos “Video Phone,” “Telephone,” “Freedom,” and Knowles-Carter’s 2018 Coachella performance to argue that she shapes Black female celebrity in a complex interplay of resisting and acquiescing to oversexualized, disparaging stereotypical representations of Black womanhood. For Beyoncé, “possessed self”
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manifests in different strategic ways, from her highly curating her representation of her personal life, to creating her Sasha Fierce persona, to controlling where her music performances and videos appear (such as exclusively on her streaming service Tidal), to explicitly claiming her Blackness in her visual album *Lemonade*. Just as Greenfield’s, Hopkins’s, and Jones’s performances, and representations of their performances, exemplify freedom as both a temporary, imagined performance and an aspiration, reading Knowles-Carter’s performances enables us to better understand the work of her Black woman singer-celebrity predecessors. I contribute to the ongoing scholarship on celebrity studies generally and Knowles-Carter specifically by bringing together and analyzing performances that showcase the complex relationship between her artistry and racial identity; I also draw upon Morgan Parker’s poetic representations of Knowles-Carter in *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé* (2017) to read Knowles-Carter’s performances in “Video Phone” and “Telephone,” arguing that the performances and Parker’s response by writing poetry (from the imagined perspective of


Beyoncé) contribute to a more complex representation of what Collins pinpoints as “our shared angle of vision.”\textsuperscript{11}

Collins’s standpoint theory illuminates Black women’s experiences as both unique and similar in their existence within systems of oppression based on race, gender and class: “Black women’s ability to forge these individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women’s survival.”\textsuperscript{12} In order to analyze how the “shared angle of vision” informs understandings of Black women’s bodies and voices within the entertainment industry, this chapter will first focus on Knowles-Carter’s oeuvre. First, I will analyze the videos “Video Phone” and “Telephone,” arguing that she performs unwieldy sexuality for the male gaze. Specifically she performs the stereotypes of Black women who “are often portrayed as sexually irresponsible, promiscuous Jezebels and as angry, combative Sapphires” in order to violently destroy the male gaze.\textsuperscript{13} By drawing upon Morgan Parker’s metaphorical representation of the singer-celebrity in \textit{There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé} to analyze Knowles-Carter’s performances in “Video Phone” and “Telephone,” I intervene in scholarship on Knowles-Carter by arguing that Parker’s poetry showcases a Black woman’s response to Beyoncé, both

\textsuperscript{11} In \textit{Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment}, Collins explains “By aggregating and articulating these individual expressions of consciousness, a collective, focused group consciousness becomes possible. Black women’s ability to forge these individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness becomes possible. Black women’s ability to forge these individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women’s survival. (Perspectives on Gender, Volume 2. Routledge, 1990, p. 45).

\textsuperscript{12} Collins, p. 45.

embracing and critiquing her as she worked through her artistry and gained access to performance opportunities by using and resisting racial caricatures. In analyzing Knowles-Carter’s performances by drawing upon Parker’s poetry, I intervene in critical reviews that turned Knowles-Carter into what feminist scholar Brittany Cooper identifies as a “brand instead of a human being, a stealthy rhetorical move that enabled them to distance themselves from her and then drag her for filth without compunction.” Parker highlights the dehumanizing consequences of understanding Beyoncé as a brand; alternatively, her poetry showcases how critique and celebration of an African-American woman singer must productively co-exist in archival formation in order to complicate the relationships between Black women singer-celebrities’ talent, identity, and history. Reflecting on how Knowles-Carter’s artistry, and how she performs her understanding of her relationship between her identity, history, and talent, I will analyze visual album *Lemonade* and Knowles-Carter’s 2018 Coachella performance to center her voice and perspective to enrich understandings of her raced and gendered experiences within the entertainment industry of the United States in the twenty first century. In doing so, this chapter foregrounds Knowles-Carter’s own voice to theorize African-American women’s experiences in the entertainment industry, arguing that her performances contribute to an archive of Black women celebrities’ performances of oppression and liberation.

Richard Douglass-Chin theorizes Sojourner Truth’s nineteenth-century performance tactics as specifically creating “a self out of the very discourses of contradiction that threaten to simultaneously embody and disembody her;” in this chapter, I apply this framework, acknowledging the distinct historical, cultural, and social differences, to illuminate Knowles-

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Carter’s potential to “demystify [sic] the ‘naturalness’ of such discourses, playing in her own self-(per)formance, upon the contradictory black female self constructed by white Americans.”

Knowles-Carter in her own contemporary context, like Truth in the nineteenth century, “becomes elusive, ‘unnatural,’ tricksterlike.”15 While I am by no means equating Truth’s experiences with Knowles-Carter’s, the entertainment industry’s “domains of power” in many ways have not changed since the nineteenth century. They manifest as structural (the implicitly and explicitly racist, sexist, and classist hegemonic discourses); disciplinary (Black women performers’ experiences as impacted by the hegemonic discourses); cultural (the white-supremacist tradition of blackface minstrelsy which shaped hegemonic discourses, specifically audiences’ stereotypical perceptions of Black performers); and interpersonal (the interactions between the performer and audience members). Knowles-Carter’s performances and Parker’s poetry both provide both unique and individual perspectives that culminate in a “shared angle of vision” that emphasizes the diverse creative resistance strategies that Knowles-Carter enacts.16

I draw upon Daphne Brooks’s methodology of theorizing nineteenth-century actress Adah Isaacs Menken’s manipulation of racial identity for celebrity success to illuminate Knowles-Carter’s artistic choices in relation to her identity and history as a Black woman singer-celebrity in the United States. Moreover, I draw upon Hip Hop and cultural studies scholar Tricia

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16 To reiterate across the chapters of this project, African-American literary scholar Koritha Mitchell argues against reducing African-American cultural forms of expression as simply protesting against oppression: “Historians and literary critics have been getting it wrong. Teachers and general readers have been getting it wrong. We’ve all been viewing African-American culture through the lens of protest…They [African-Americans] affirm themselves knowing they will inspire aggression as well as praise” (Mitchell, Koritha, “Not About Protest.” YouTube, uploaded by Koritha Mitchell, 4 Feb. 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abud9brDKgc).
Rose, who cautions against projecting political intent onto Black artists. Specifically, Rose asserts, “Popular culture is not a genre nor a political position; but rather, it is a terrain of struggle between resistance and incorporation of politically radical challenges to dominant oppressive ideas.” In making herself visible as a Black woman singer-celebrity, Knowles-Carter inevitably takes a political position against an entertainment industry and power systems that seek to render them invisible (as Kimberlé Crenshaw emphasizes), yet also embraces the entertainment industry to make herself visible and audible as a Black woman singer-celebrity. Bringing together Douglass-Chin, Brooks’s, and Rose’s assertions about performance and resistance with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s call for an intersectional methodology which acknowledges how “race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences,” this chapter considers the following questions: How does Knowles-Carter shape her artistry within an entertainment industry that has historically rendered Black women’s voices and experiences silent and/or invisible? How do we comprehend Black women singer-celebrities’ voices through the discourses of those who represented and represent them? How can archival materials help us understand the similar strategies Black women singer-celebrities might have forged and enacted? What artistic strategies connect these performers together, other than, or in addition to, blackness? As present literary scholars examining the past, what can we learn from cultural texts that represent Black women celebrities’ performances of “Freedom!” within the entertainment industry specifically, and within legal and financial

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institutions generally? By focusing on how her performances embrace, play with, and reject stereotypes of Black womanhood, this chapter “stages intersectionality” I argue that the diverse ways in which Knowles-Carter performs exemplify the relationships between her talent, as well as her racial and gender identities.

In Knowles-Carter’s first two solo albums, *Dangerously in Love* (2003) and *B’Day* (2006), she performs a self\(^{19}\) that communicates deeply personal love, strength, and vulnerability in predominantly the first person, presenting her personal life in relationship to others and herself. In her third album, *I Am...Sasha Fierce* (2008), she complicates her construction of self, representing her experiences through her alter-ego Sasha Fierce. For instance, Knowles-Carter performs “If I Were a Boy,” in which she reflects on infidelity from her partner’s perspective, simultaneously shifting her subject position to a “boy” and, at the same time imagining what she would do. This album also includes a shift in the repertoire that she sings, specifically with her rendition of Franz Schubert’s “Ave Maria.”\(^{20}\) Knowles-Carter’s version of “Ave Maria,” represents a journey of loss (“She was lost in so many different ways/ Out of the darkness with no guide”) and finding herself in the love of someone else who could be read as a lover or, in the traditional context of the song, in God (“But I still go home knowing that I’ve got you/ There’s only us when the lights go down”). In Ryan Dombal’s review of *I Am...Sasha Fierce*, he reveals a double-standard: “Her twist on ‘Ave Maria’ is vocally impeccable, but it reads more like recital

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\(^{19}\) A significant part of Knowles-Carter’s brand that she has carefully curated since 2003 is that her personal life heavily influences her musical oeuvre. For instance, she identifies herself by name, and others in songs refer to her by name. Many of the introductions to her songs include her speaking from her own perspective, or someone else responding to “Bey,” which frames many of her songs as personal, in the first person (See singles “Crazy in Love” and “Me, Myself, and I” from *Dangerously in Love* (2003) and “Upgrade U” and “Resentment” from *B’Day* (2006)).

fodder rather than a true confessional.” Dombal backsteps on his applause of her “impeccable” talent by critiquing this song as not genuinely confessional. What constitutes “true confessional,” and why does that get held above “recital fodder”? Knowles-Carter established expectations with her artistry with her first two albums being incredibly personal, yet, why can the performance not stand on its own as a showcase of talent?

The success that she found by performing songs that were “genuinely confessional” allowed her to take an artistic freedom to perform “Ave Maria,” but since that music choice doesn’t fit with the preconceived notions she’s shaped for her audience, Dombal critiques her negatively. Dombal makes a lot of assumptions about the exclusivity of vocal talent and authenticity, which, I argue Knowles-Carter already was engaging and playing with by creating “a self out of the very discourses of contradiction that threaten to simultaneously embody and disembody her;” another layer of this self is Sasha Fierce. W.E.B. DuBois’s theorization of “double consciousness” as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others,” provides a way of understanding Knowles-Carter’s complex performances as a Black woman singer-celebrity. These performances shape a personal self that includes Beyoncé and Sasha Fierce, leading her to manipulate audience expectations, unapologetically showcasing her vocal range and talent with “Ave Maria,” imagining “If I Were a Boy.” Knowles-Carter can step into her first-person reflections and back into her “Fierce” alter ego when she wants; these artistic choices make her experiences as a Black woman in the entertainment industry visible and audible.

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Resisting Objectification with Sexuality and Violence in “Video Phone”

The album that premieres Knowles-Carter’s ego Sasha Fierce is the same album in which she performs a self that encompasses “discourses of contradiction,” both sexually alluring femininity and aggressive masculinity, to showcase how the male gaze “threatens to simultaneously embody and disembody her,” and to counter that threat by taking back control. In the music video for the extended remix of “Video Phone”\(^{23}\) featuring Gaga, Knowles-Carter creates “a self out of the very discourses of contradiction that threaten to simultaneously embody and disembody her.” Specifically, she “demystifies [sic] the ‘naturalness’ of such discourses, playing in her own self-(per)formance, upon the contradictory black female self constructed by white Americans.”\(^{24}\) Specifically, upholds disparaging stereotypes of unwieldy Black sexuality and aggression; her sexual allure draws the male gaze in, and the aggressive masculinity seeks to obtain control by ‘denaturalizing’ her performance, showing she can perform both femininity and masculinity, and, literally shooting (aiming her gun at men and the viewers) and smashing (she both dances with and pushes back against figures in suits with cameras for heads) the male gaze.

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\(^{23}\) “Video Phone” YouTube, uploaded by Beyoncé, 17 Nov. 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGkvXp0vdng. 

\(^{24}\) Douglass-Chin, pp. 59-60.
She simultaneously relies upon feminine, revealing costume choices and alluring dance moves, as well as the accoutrements of criminality such as blindfolds and guns, and aggressively masculine dance moves.

The video opens with an entourage of four men walking behind Knowles-Carter, dressed in a dominatrix outfit with a black mask covering all but her eyes and mouth; the black mask signals her performance as such, in which she denaturalizes (and critiques) all the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity that she will perform in the video.

Shawn Michelle Smith’s assertion (which draws upon W.E.B. DuBois’s theorization of “double consciousness”) that a “remarkable collection of photographs DuBois assembled for the American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900… emblematize the complicated visual dynamics of double consciousness” provides a way to read Knowles-Carter’s perception and performance of Black female celebrity in the entertainment industry. Knowles-Carter, as a Black woman singer-celebrity, “emblematize[s] the complicated visual dynamics of double consciousness” provides a way to read Knowles-Carter’s perception and performance of Black female celebrity in the entertainment industry.  

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consciousness” by making the oppressive male gaze visible, and her response to that male gaze visible and audible in a way she had not yet done.\(^{26}\)

In the montage that ensues, Knowles-Carter performs criminality that showcases the perception of herself as a Black woman singer-celebrity in the entertainment industry and resists the oppressive male gaze. This criminality begins with a representation of herself as stereotypically feminine; then, a solo dancing Knowles-Carter turns into multiple, and we cannot tell who the real Knowles-Carter is. As she alluringly dances, she allures listeners with her voice:

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Shawty, watcha name is?
Them hustlas keep on talkin’
They like the way I’m walkin’
You saying that you want me?
So press record, I’ll let you film me
On your video phone
Make a cameo
Take me on your video phone
I can handle you
Watch me on your video phone
On your video, video
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\(^{26}\) While I acknowledge that Knowles-Carter’s “Video Phone” performance exists within a different historical context, and focuses on the white gaze of Black women versus Black men, in contrast to Smith’s focus, her performance also “emblematize[s] the complicated visual dynamics of double consciousness.”
If you want me you can watch me on your video phone27

A complex interplay of lyrics and image make Knowles-Carter’s experience of performance before the male gaze both visible and audible. The lyrics themselves articulate the reality of being recorded in the eyes of the male gaze, but, in additionally manipulating her image, Knowles-Carter breaks the gaze’s singular focus. The lyrics and images simultaneously represent the reality of working with and resisting the male gaze.

Once Knowles-Carter plays into the expectations of the male gaze, alluring by giving permission to record her, as well as fulfilling the expectations of her feminine and fierce performance and dress style, she takes fierce to another, literally criminal, level. In a montage of images, Knowles-Carter holds men hostage; the faceless men’s video camera heads transform into silky blue bags that completely cover their heads.

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She exudes sexual allure and violence, simultaneously leaning on them while holding up a gun to them. Yet, they cannot see the gun she holds up to them; her critique of the male gaze is visible to viewers but not to the men who enact the male gaze in the video. Her critique of the male gaze happens in plain sight; she both profits off both using and critiquing the male gaze to her benefit.

Towards the end of the video, Knowles-Carter asserts even more control over the frame of the music video, calling attention to the control she wields in plain sight that she has not yet made the viewing audience privy to. The entire music video includes black bars at the top and bottom of the frame, as is customary with images of film created in a ratio for theater screening that are then transitioned into television screening. Knowles-Carter explodes this seemingly ambivalent detail, calling attention to the voyeurism of the viewing audience, regardless of if they have bought her critique of the male gaze or have participated in it. She turns her guns from the men to the camera lens, shooting directly at the screen while saying “If you want me you can watch me on your video phone”:

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28 Another instance of Knowles-Carter wielding a gun as both a playful and violent symbol for alluring and resisting the male gaze is in the music video “Feeling Myself.” Knowles-Carter and Nicki Minaj lay in a children’s blow up pool shooting water guns at the camera and each other by Knowles-Carter sings “Changed the game with that digital drop/Know where you was when that digital popped/I stopped the world/ Male or female, it make no difference/I stop the world, world stop/Carry on” (*Tidal*, 18 May 2015, https://listen.tidal.com/search?q=feeling%20myself).

29 We see later manifestations of Knowles-Carter’s performances of femininity and masculinity in “Hold Up” from the visual album *Lemonade*. As she spins around in a flowy dress, she swings a baseball bat to break car windshields and the camera; in contrast to “Video Phone,” she tempers the representation of dominatrix-style femininity (by wearing a less revealing, softer dress) and aggressive masculinity (by predominantly smiling and drastically, temporarily shifting to aggressive snarls). In contrast to “Video Phone,” Black women look on and laugh and smile with her, while Black men in the video shake their heads. She smashes a video camera, similarly smashing the voyeuristic male gaze, and calling attention to the audience watching her communicate a deeply personal process of becoming (*Tidal*, 4 Sept. 2016, https://listen.tidal.com/search?q=hold%20up).
The shrapnel explodes the frame; the ratio was masquerading as such, yet was under Knowles-Carter’s artistic control the entire time. She denaturalizes everything in this performance as performance, including the frame in which she performs. Through lyrics and images, she has kept the audience blindfolded the entire time like the embodiments of the male gaze she poses with, calling attention to the voyeurism viewers enact and can critique.

While Knowles-Carter is a Black woman singer-celebrity performing in this video, the male gaze entails both Black and white men in the music video. My argument about this video, that Knowles-Carter counters the male gaze with allure and violence could, arguably be extended to all women singer-celebrities, especially since the video ends with an extended section where Beyoncé and Lady Gaga dance nearly identically (the choreography is in Beyoncé’s hyper-feminine style compared to Gaga’s intentionally monstrous style in “Telephone”), sitting on a chair, spreading and closing their legs while flipping their hair. They wear the same white corseted outfit and long, blown-out hair. Beyoncé’s hair is brown and her high heels are red, while Gaga’s hair is bleached blonde and her high heels are yellow. The camera shot then blurs, layering the two performers:
The women are both the same in the outfit they wear and the choreography they perform, yet are different in their hair, skin, and shoe color. What is the significance of highlighting sameness and difference in construction of the two selves?

While Knowles-Carter’s and Lady Gaga’s outfits and choreography are the same at this moment in the video, the performances and contexts are different. What is at stake in Knowles-Carter alluring and assaulting the male gaze versus Gaga doing so? Drawing upon celebrity studies scholars Su Holmes’s and Sean Redmond’s emphasis “to return to the past” to enhance audience understanding of “the interplay between past and present,” my reading of the video draws upon the historical over-sexualized and criminal stereotypes of Black womanhood as a difference; Morgan Parker’s poem “Freaky Friday Starring Beyoncé and Lady Gaga” provides a way to understand Knowles-Carter’s context as a Black woman singer-celebrity in the video that illuminates “the interplay between past and present” in imagining Knowles-Carter’s and Lady Gaga’s different relationships to history. How does the “self” of the poem provide a way of understanding the “self” in the video? The poem imagines, via the popular novel and film Freaky Friday in which a mother and daughter change bodies, what the experience would be for Beyoncé and Lady Gaga to change bodies as a Black and a white woman performer. I argue that

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31 Versions of the Freaky Friday include the 1972 novel by Mary Rodgers, the 1976 film with Barbara Harris and Jodie Foster, and the 2003 film with Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan.
this poem theorizes the male gaze by both making their performances simultaneously not and always already about race. The “self” of the poem is dependent on biological physical signifiers, described in language coded by racial difference. Specifically, the Beyoncé persona compares her “booty” to Lady Gaga’s “butt,” her “glitz” to Lady Gaga’s “glam,” her “rhythm” to Lady Gaga’s “rock.”32 These language variations constitutes women singer-celebrities as same, but different in terms of racial identification. The persona then reflects on how Lady Gaga would wear her black skin as a “cold black cape,” while she wore Lady Gaga’s “fishnets.”33 These comparisons specifically highlight skin color difference for Beyoncé, but accessory difference for Lady Gaga. Yet, they have the potential to become embodied by the other person when the bodies are switched.

The poem both naturalizes and denaturalizes these physical qualities as a way of representing how Beyoncé shapes the self. The one different attribute between the women that the poem identifies is Beyoncé’s history “branded” to Lady Gaga’s history “borrowed.” The poem calls attention to the past in a way that the music video doesn’t; history “branded” versus history “borrowed.”34 In the present, “Branded” connotes Beyoncé constructing a “brand” of history through her music that showcases her relationships with herself, her man, and her family. “Branded” also connotes a history that is written on the body; specifically, as a Black woman singer-celebrity, Knowles-Carter inherits a history of representation that caricatures Black women as oversexualized and criminal. These caricatures justified the enslavement and dehumanization of (including literal branding and violating of Black bodies within the chattel

33 Parker, p. 27.
34 Parker, p. 27.
slave system), as well as violence against, Black people. Knowles-Carter’s and Lady Gaga’s raced and gendered experiences are different; however, the poetic persona of this piece explains,

the secret is
I’m a body for anyone
to fill…I’m just a slab of something.  

Both celebrities are empty shells onto which anyone can project anything. However, the role race plays, whether explicitly or implicitly, in audience perception of Knowles-Carter and her own self-perception of embracing and rejecting stereotypes is that audience perceptions of Black women performers have historically shaped by racialized stereotypes of over-sexual and criminal Black women. As an imagined representation of Beyoncé in comparison to Lady Gaga, this poem hinges on complicating difference and similarity, speaking back to an entertainment industry that provides women singer-celebrities visibility on certain terms; in this case, terms of displaying “Blackness” that is consumable for white audiences, which involves not explicitly representing the past. This poem, as a response from Parker to Beyoncé and Lady Gaga’s collaborations, theorizes the two women both as themselves and not as themselves. The poem makes Knowles-Carter’s experience within the entertainment industry—which is impacted by history—visible and audible in a way that the music video does not. Parker reflects on the limitations and liberties that both performers have within the entertainment industry they’re navigating.

Performing Freedom and Imprisonment in “Telephone”

In the music video for “Telephone” (released four months after “Video Phone”), Knowles-Carter again engages with stereotypes of the oversexualized Black femininity and aggressive and violent Black masculinity; she stages intersectionality by embodying both

35 Parker, p. 28.
36 See works by celebrity theorists Chris Rojek, Leo Braudy, and Joseph Roach for further reading.
performances in herself, calling attention to the “unnaturalness” of her performance, and making her experience of navigating audience expectations visible and audible. “Telephone” opens with a scene of imprisonment (in which Lady Gaga\textsuperscript{37} has been arrested for an unknown crime and is incarcerated) and freedom (in which Knowles-Carter drives around in a “Pussywagon” on her cellphone trying to get in touch with Lady Gaga in prison). The homoerotic overtones of the prison scenes include women sexually connecting with each other, including Gaga. A prison guard announces over the loud speaker “Beyoncé on the Line for Gaga” before Gaga answers and begins singing to Beyoncé:

Hello, hello baby you called, I can’t hear a thing.
I have got no service in the club you see, see.
What what what did you say?
Oh, you’re breaking up on me.
Sorry I cannot hear you I’m kind of busy.
Stop telephonin’ me.\textsuperscript{38}

After Gaga sings and dances with other women in the prison, Beyoncé bails her out of prison and picks her up. When Gaga gets in the car, Beyoncé says “you’ve been a very bad girl. A very, very, bad girl, Gaga.” They playfully create personas of themselves that are sexual and awkward, abrupt and stealthy; both Gaga and Beyoncé take on and take off performances of femininity and masculinity. In the style of Quentin Tarantino’s movies \textit{Kill Bill} and \textit{Pulp Fiction}, Beyoncé takes a bite of a honey bun and then feeds it to Gaga before revving her yellow “Pussywagon” pick-up truck. As they drive, a dialogue ensues:

Gaga: Sure you wanna do this honey bee?
Beyoncé: What do you mean am I sure?
Gaga: You know what they say, once you kill a cow, you gotta make a burger.
Beyoncé: You know Gaga, trust is like a mirror. You can fix it if it’s broken.

\textsuperscript{37} Lady Gaga is the stage name of Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta (b. 1986), American singer, songwriter, and actress.
Gaga: But you can still see the crack in that motherfuckin reflection.\(^\text{39}\)

On the radio, an emcee then announces, “this is Lady Gaga featuring Beyoncé, in ‘Telephone,’” and directly following, Beyoncé aggressively poses while Gaga takes Polaroid pictures of her. Beyoncé proclaims, “Boy, the way you blowin’ up my phone won’t make me leave no faster.” At this point, viewers understand that Gaga killed her man because he was abusive. Now, they are going to go take care of Beyoncé’s man for the same reason. They go to a diner and Beyoncé sits across the table from him. When he gets up, she pours a sinister-looking vial of liquid (that we learn by simultaneously shifting scenes is poisonous blue liquid that Gaga advertises on the television) into his coffee. Suddenly, all the people in the diner die, with their faces falling into their food (implying that Lady Gaga poisoned everyone). Just as they assault the male gaze in “Video Phone,” in “Telephone,” their performance is both alluring and toxic poison for viewers and listeners. They get back into their Pussywagon as Beyoncé and Lady Gaga continue to sing the “Telephone” chorus and pose in funeral garb:

Gaga says, “We did it honey bee. Now let’s go far far away from here.” Beyoncé responds, “you promise we’ll never come back?” Gaga assures her, “I promise.” They grasp hands with a heart that closes the frame. I argue that through this performance, Knowles-Carter stages intersectionality by showcasing her talent which involves performing personas, as well as staging solidarity with Gaga as a white woman performer.

Critical responses to the music video include Aylin Zafar’s deconstruction of the video for The Atlantic which celebrates the video as Gaga’s “pièce de résistance” inspired by “pop art pioneers Roy Lichenstein and Andy Warhol.”40 However, Zafar explains,

Much like Warhol, she has as much a part in feeding into pop consumer culture as she has in making a statement against it. Whatever product placement or triviality exists within her videos can be excused as art under the pretense of her participation in the pop art movement—whether “Gaga as a product is really who she is or the product of a label is almost irrelevant when you consider that maybe she’s the modern-day Marcel Duchamp or René Magritte.”41

By critiquing and fighting back against oppressive men in the video, yet through a popular cultural form of the music video, sexualization and images, Gaga both challenges and perpetuates systems of oppression within society and the entertainment industry. But what about Beyoncé and her role in this piece? Gaga has starring and writing credits listed at the beginning of the “Telephone” video, yet Beyoncé’s song “Video Phone” featuring Lady Gaga was released

41 Zafar.
first, received much less critical analysis, and was taken less seriously even though she had been theorizing celebrity and persona on her own terms, most obviously through her Sasha Fierce alter ego. Ashanka Kumari considers the two women together, explaining that “Like drag performers, these women queer tropes of masculinity and femininity, playing with gender and gender identity. Using alter-egos, Lady Gaga and Beyoncé have developed extravagant costumes and eccentric productions audiences now expect.”

Parker’s poem “Beyoncé on the Line for Gaga” (the title is a direct quotation from the music video when the warden lets Gaga know that Beyoncé is on the phone for her) consists entirely of Beyoncé speaking to Lady Gaga over the phone; in other words, I argue that in the poem re-writing the lyrics of the song, Parker provides an imagined, voiced response from Beyoncé outside of the context of the music video. Parker imagines Knowles-Carter as not just an angry vengeful woman, but a specifically angry vengeful Black woman. Parker imagines Knowles-Carter performing this anger while also being aware of the Sapphire and Jezebel stereotypes. While Lady Gaga was hailed by critics as an artist who theorizes celebrity and performance and supposedly helped contribute to Beyoncé’s growing fame, in this poem, the poetic persona takes back control of the stage that Lady Gaga supposedly ruled. The poem can be read as Beyoncé speaking back to Lady Gaga, or, simply representing the more significant

role that Beyoncé plays in the song. This poem can also be read as an audience response from Parker as an African-American woman audience member; in imagining a phone call between Beyoncé and Lady Gaga, Parker represents Beyoncé controlling the conversation. The title explicitly states the opinion that Beyoncé made a name for Gaga, not the other way around. The poem represents how Beyoncé is in control and more compelling than Gaga.

Parker imagines Knowles-Carter’s anger at collaborating with Gaga, as well as anger at an entertainment industry that upholds the “naturalness” of Black talent; throughout this poem, Parker imagines Knowles-Carter’s strategic artistic choices that shape her singing act and celebrity status. The poetic persona of Beyoncé proclaims, “Girl you know you ain’t that busy” the first time she appears in Parker’s collection. Her response implies that she has been trying to get in touch with Lady Gaga without success, and now has the chance to speak to her in frustration. Beyoncé goes on to explain what will be a hyper-performance, over the top, for both, at Beyoncé’s, rather than Lady Gaga’s, direction. The poetic persona of Beyoncé takes control of both her body and her voice. For example, Beyoncé’s body becomes a place of birth: “come into these hips/ and live.” Her voice is similarly under her control: “Lips glossed opening/ for a special purpose. You say Tell ’em B/ I open my legs, throw my shades on like, / Divas gettin’ money.” Imagining Beyoncé in poetic persona reveals that even though Lady Gaga prompts Beyoncé to sing, off stage, Beyoncé has explained that Lady Gaga will prompt her to sing. In other words, Beyoncé controls the prompting of her voice and her body. The poem ends with the proclamation “Tonight    I make a name for you.” Beyoncé, as poetic persona, explains that Lady Gaga’s success is created by her, not the other way around. This poem theorizes how Beyoncé

45 Parker, p. 12.
46 Parker, p. 13.
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understands and enacts control within the entertainment industry as a Black woman singer-celebrity by providing an imagined, voiced explanation of how Beyoncé shapes her voice and body on stage.

**Performing, Demanding, Aspiring “Freedom”**

“Video Phone” and “Telephone” exemplify how Knowles-Carter makes her experiences as a Black woman within the entertainment simultaneously visible and consumable, and highlights the history and Blackness that does not fulfill expectations held up by minstrelsy, the historically powerful tool of white supremacy. Another layer of the “contradictory black female self constructed by white Americans” that Knowles-Carter continues to shape through her artistry might be most powerfully articulated in white responses to her 2016 Super Bowl performance and visual album *Lemonade* which engages with the past in a different way compared to her previous performances. In *Lemonade*, she explicitly includes history via a plantation setting and nineteenth-century women’s dress costume choices, and racial violence through her inclusion of Black women whose family members who were brutally and unjustly killed by police, as well as a Black boy who dances in front of a line of police, then freezes with his hands up with “Stop shooting us” graffiti on the wall. Gerrick D. Kennedy explains the significance of a Super Bowl performance in which “she delivered the black power salute, paid homage to civil rights leader Malcolm X and dressed in a militant, leather ensemble inspired by the Black Panthers and Michael Jackson”:

Nearly 112 million viewers saw Beyoncé upend her public persona. It was the rare political statement from an artist who until that moment had spent most of her career striving for pop perfection with audacious anthems of female empowerment and

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47 Knowles-Carter released the single and music video “Formation” on February 6, 2016. A day later, she performed “Formation” during her Super Bowl performance. Knowles-Carter released the visual album *Lemonade* on April 23, 2016 (“Formation” was the concluding song).
sexuality. Critics accused her of being anti-police, condemned her ensemble and a Tennessee sheriff even blamed her for shots fired outside his home.\textsuperscript{48}

While a closer consideration of Knowles-Carter’s oeuvre reveals that her racial and gender identities always already were factors in her artistry, media outlets described these performances as specifically “black,” where her blackness was associated with “protest” and no longer easily consumable and non-threatening for white audiences.\textsuperscript{49}

The Saturday Night Live parody video “The Day Beyoncé Turned Black,” which showcases not-so-hyperbolized white responses to her performances in the genre of a horror film trailer, highlights the “frightening” connections between a Black woman singer-celebrity making explicit reference to her experience within power systems via history and political statements by both self-identifying as Black and critiquing police brutality.\textsuperscript{50} In the skit, white people look on at their televisions and scream as reporters say “Beyoncé released a new music video that embraces her black heritage…she mentions the Black Lives Matter movement…Black, Black, Black” and the headline “BEYONCÉ RELEASES UNAPOLOGETICALLY BLACK VIDEO” looms on the screen. A white woman yells for her husband to come into the living room, and when he asks her what’s wrong, she responds, while staring straight into the eyes of viewers, “Beyoncé…is…black.” White actors in an office yell to each other “guys, I don’t understand this


\textsuperscript{49} In the Saturday Night Live video “The Day Beyoncé Turned Black,” Kate McKinnon proclaims “Beyoncé is Black? What about ‘Single Ladies’?” To which Kenan Thompson replies, “She was black in that.” McKinnon shrieks, “What about Jumpin’ Jumpin’?” to which Thompson, in disbelief, replies, “She was Black in that, too” (“The Day Beyoncé Turned Black.” \textit{YouTube}, uploaded by Saturday Night Live, 14 Feb. 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ociMBfkDG1w).

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new song,” “Hot sauce in my bag, swag…what does that mean?” A white guy slowly, confusingly says “This song…isn’t for us” while a white woman proclaims, “but usually everything is!” The scene shifts to a chaotic gridlocked street, reminiscent of a zombie apocalypse. Another conversation ensues when a white woman walks up to a Black woman and says:

“We have to go. We have to leave America. Beyoncé is Black.”
“Amy, I’m black.”
“Wait, no you’re not. You’re, like, my girl.”
“Yeah, but I can still be black.”

While the primary purpose of this skit is to entertain, this video parodies white audience expectations for Knowles-Carter as a Black woman singer, and highlights what is consumable about “blackness” and what isn’t. Leading up to her release of *Lemonade*, she was making herself visible by singing lyrics that celebrated relying on herself, reflecting on her love for her husband and his infidelity, and celebrating sisterhood with her friends and family. While white women could, on the surface, relate to her and the lyrics, the history of Black women asserting subjectivity within institutions that denied them humanity and citizenship, the history of Black relationships and Black masculinity in the United States, and the history of Black family formation in the United States are all specifically influenced by race and gender. While Knowles-Carter benefitted from making those points of connection in her previous work accessible for a broader audience, or, at least consumable to white audiences, in *Lemonade*, she gets more unapologetically intersectional, making those connections predominantly through her race and gender, not just gender. Or, in the perception of white audience members, “too Black.”

While Knowles-Carter’s previous videos showcase her dancing and singing with Black women dancers which in its own right creates employment opportunities for Black women in the entertainment industry, *Lemonade* becomes understood as “Black” from white audiences’
perspectives because of Knowles-Carter’s artistic decisions to situate herself as Black woman among Black women, surrounded by explicit, more “politicized” signifiers of Black womanhood. For instance, in “Formation,” she references her origins, through her parent’s raced identities and location, as well as herself and her legacy, through hers and her child’s raced physical attributes:

MY DADDY ALABAMA
MY MAMA LOUISIANA
YOU MIX THAT NEGRO WITH THAT CREOLD MAKE A TEXAS-BAMA
I LIKE MY BABY HAIR WITH BABY HAIR AND AFROS
I LIKE MY NEGRO NOSE WITH JACKSON 5 NOSTRILS\(^{51}\)

White audiences can’t identify with these raced, physical signifiers compared to singles such as “Flawless” (“I woke up like this”) and “Drunk in Love” (“Beautiful bodies grinding off in that club”) from her preceding 2013 visual album *Beyoncé*. I argue that Knowles-Carter stages intersectionality in explicitly centering herself as a Black woman who is sexual, who is a skilled artist, who is a mother and wife, who is a friend, amongst an audience of Black women. Two “discourses of contradiction” powerfully White audiences hold two “discourses of contradiction” that powerfully impact Knowles-Carter’s artistic choices as a Black woman singer-celebrity: first, the contradiction that popular music and video can be used for political ends, and second, the past is separate and should not be brought up in the present. These contradictions have impacted how Knowles-Carter presents herself in her videos and evidence how the white gaze “threatens to simultaneously embody and disembody her”\(^{52}\). Her presence as a Black woman singer-celebrity is and always has been political; however, in performing a selfhood in *Lemonade* that makes an explicitly political statement, specifically that Black women’s lives and well-being


matter, and that past cultural and legislative forces directly impact how Black women are perceived and navigate systems of power, Knowles-Carter counters that threat by taking back control of conversations around Black women singer-celebrities that includes acknowledging the past to wield agency to shape subjectivities and representations that have been historically objectified in the present. Drawing upon Holmes’s and Redmond’s emphasis “to return to the past” to enhance audience understanding of “the interplay between past and present,” I argue that an essential part of Knowles-Carter wielding control over her artistry in *Lemonade* is by making the presence of history in Black performance visible and audible in ways she had not yet done in her oeuvre. Moreover, she frames the past as one that was oppressive, but is not solely oppressive in the present; “the interplay between past and present” in *Lemonade* allows for her experiences within the entertainment industry to be visible and audible in a way that never had been before, and, allows for a representation of Black women’s experiences within power systems to be visible and audible in a way she has never showcased in her artistry before.

But first, she opens *Lemonade* by drawing audiences in with one of her classic artistic choices, what Ryan Dombal identifies as a “true confessional” that earned rave reviews from white audiences in her past performances to lead into the more “raced” representations compared to her previous artistry. In front of a red curtain on a stage lined with lightbulbs, Knowles-Carter kneels and solemnly sings “Pray You Catch Me.” She sets a scene of a woman hoping her partner catches her listening to what he’s saying to the woman he’s having an affair with. Knowles-Carter continues to intertwine her personal life and artistry. Knowles-Carter expands

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

from this traditional artistic choice that has influenced how she shapes herself by collectively representing a process of healing throughout this album. Encompassing eleven chapters including “Intuition,” “Denial,” “Anger,” “Apathy,” “Emptiness,” “Accountability,” “Reformation,” “Forgiveness,” “Resurrection,” “Hope,” and “Redemption,” the album showcases a process of healing, and creating a subjectivity that is in many ways similar, and in many ways different from her previous performances. Another way *Lemonade* creates subjectivity is by centering a diverse representation of Black womanhood by including poetry and prose by expatriate Somali writer Warsan Shire, as well as Black women who powerfully impact American culture such as Serena Williams, Sybrina Fulton (mother of Trayvon Martin), Lesley McFadden (mother of Michael Brown), Gwen Carr (mother of Eric Garner), Zendaya, Chloe x Halle, Ibeyi, Laolu Senbanjo, Amandla Stenberg, Quvenzhané Wallis, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In centering a process of becoming, creating a subjectivity that centers Black women and their experiences, Knowles-Carter de-centers the minstrel tradition that were always already influencing audience reception of Black performers, and instead centers the pain and joy of her personal success, connecting with other Black women’s experiences.

By analyzing the penultimate chapter of *Lemonade*, “Hope,” in which she performs “Freedom,” I argue that Knowles-Carter simultaneously represents the past and present to articulate her subjectivity as a Black women singer-celebrity within a diverse, complex archive of Black womanhood. Analyzing the interplay between the past and present in Knowles-Carter’s performances illuminate her artistic choices and strategies, as well as honor her identity’s and history’s role in shaping her artistry. Taking up the perception of white audiences’ shift from Beyoncé as woman performer to Beyoncé as a Black woman performer, I interrogate the ways in which Knowles-Carter enacts resistance by making her experience as a Black woman performer
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visible and audible by shaping herself as a citizen and human that resides within institutions that both provide spaces to communicate with conditions, and are complicit in silencing Black women. I also argue that another way Knowles-Carter becomes “Black” to white audiences is through explicitly situating herself among and before an audience of Black women in the song “Freedom” to represent community formation essential to healing and self-development.\(^55\)

Instead of centering a history of representation impacted by minstrelsy, Knowles-Carter begins this chapter, “Hope,” by centering a history of representation shaped by Black women, for black women. The scene opens with Black women in a kitchen at Madewood Plantation House in Napoleonville, Louisiana preparing food while Knowles-Carter’s voice narrates the scene:

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The nail technician pushes my cuticles back
Turns my hand over
Stretches the skin on my palm and says\(^56\)
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Summoning a plantation through image and nail salon through sound, Knowles-Carter showcases the “interplay between past and present,”\(^57\) through spaces where women read and nourish each other’s bodies amongst themselves; Knowles-Carter acknowledges the oppressive past, and shows she’s not doing anything new, imagining moments of liberation in which Black women created community amongst themselves. Knowles-Carter briefly pauses, while the image

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\(^55\) I know that I’m stating the obvious in making clear that Beyoncé surrounds herself literally with Black women watching her on stage, and I don’t mean to “whitesplain,” but this idea is essential in being a white woman invested in having conversations with other white people and teaching white students about Black Art. Simultaneously, I’m able to communicate that this art isn’t necessarily for you or about you, and that’s OK. Listening and being aware of biases that are historically embedded in culture is essential to begin identifying and counteracting oppression at the axes of race, class, and gender.


shifts from the kitchen to an open field where Black women stand grandly on a stage. Knowles-Carter continues:

I see your daughters, and their daughters,
That night in a dream, the first girl emerges from a slit in my stomach
The scar heals into a smile
The man I love pulls the stitches out with his fingernails
We leave black sutures curling on the side of the bath
I wake as the second girl crawls head first up my throat
A flower, blossoming, out of the hole in my face

Continuing to situate women among women, Knowles-Carter shapes a self through imagining the origins of Black women’s representations coming from themselves, although still steeped in history. Knowles-Carter creates a space where Black women creating an archive of themselves, for themselves. After Knowles-Carter speaks this powerfully poetic image of birth, the image shifts to Black women and girls in the open field, sitting in front of the stage at night. Blooming from the silence as the camera zooms in on Knowles-Carter standing in the middle of the stage, she sings:

TRYING TO REIGN

TRYING TO RAIN ON THE THUNDER
TELL THE STORM I’M NEW
I’MA WALK
I’MA MARCH
ON THE REGULAR
PAINTING WHITE FLAGS BLUE
LORD FORGIVE ME I’VE BEEN RUNNING
RUNNING BLIND IN TRUTH
I’MA RAIN
I’MA REIGN
ON THIS BITTER LOVE
TELL THE SWEET I’M NEW
I’M TELLING THESE TEARS GONNA FALL AWAY FALL AWAY…OOOH
MAY THE LAST ONE BURN INTO FLAMES

Knowles-Carter’s audible performance, based on the surrounding context clues, signals literal liquid rain falling on thunder; however, the metaphor of thunder could resemble the critical responses to Knowles-Carter artistry that she wants to both extinguish and hold control over. The lyrics in textual form reveals the inclusion of the homophone “reign,” which connotes, in contrast to seemingly neutral liquid “rain,” to “hold royal office; rule as king of queen.” The lyrics simultaneously communicate a “discourse of contradiction” with “rain” and “reign,” leading Knowles-Carter to communicate rain as a politically neutral metaphor for extinguishing the pain caused by personal infidelity and betrayal and systemic oppression based on the entertainment industry and legal system, as well as the more politically-charged reign of taking control and ruling over her artistry on her terms. The rain becomes “tears” by the end of the verse, signaling powerful emotionality; where vulnerability and sadness become empowering and essential to healing from infidelity, which the visual album begins with, but then expands out

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to include larger systems such as the entertainment industry and legal systems. Following this
verse, post-dubbed music grandly blares\(^{60}\) while she continues to sing the chorus:

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FREEDOM
FREEDOM
I CAN’T MOVE
FREEDOM CUT ME LOOSE
FREEDOM
FREEDOM
WHERE ARE YOU?
CAUSE I NEED FREEDOM TOO
I BREAK CHAINS ALL BY MYSELF
WON’T LET MY FREEDOM ROT IN HELL
I’MA KEEP RUNNING CAUSE A WINNER DON’T QUIT ON THEMSELVES\(^{61}\)
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“Freedom” becomes a performance of aspiration, just as “rain” and “reign” resemble.

Simultaneously, the lyrics communicate physical and mental entrapment and movement. The
lyrics demand for “Freedom” as a noun to “cut me loose” but also proclaim “I break chains all by
myself.” Knowles-Carter, as the speaker of the lyrics, articulates that even though her identity as
a Black woman within systems that oppression based on race, class, and gender can be
imprisoning, her freedom is also in her hands. Then, music plays while another Black woman
dances alone on the stage. Black women stare into the camera, fluctuating between Black women
watching performance and eating together at a table. Knowles-Carter sings:

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I’M A WADE
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\(^{60}\) While I focus on how Knowles-Carter represents Black womanhood and Black women’s
experiences within the entertainment industry, Nicole Cook provides a way to understand how
Knowles-Carter’s sampling choices also highlight the “interplay of past and present”:
“Beyoncé’s Freedom is a musical labor of love. It connects the 1960s Civil Rights Era to present
day Black Lives Matter Movement through its samplings of Frank Tirado ‘Let Me Try’
performed by Kaleidoscope, “Collection Speech/Unidentified Lining Hymn” (1959) performed
by Reverend R.C. Crenshaw; and “Stewball” (1947), recorded by Alan Lomax and John Lomax,
Sr., performed by Prisoner “22” at Mississippi State Penitentiary.” (“Beyoncé’s ‘Freedom’: The

Nicole Cook explains that “Beyoncé’s voice echoes the past. The lyrics she sings gives homage to old negro spirituals, and even makes a reference to an old hymn ‘Wade in the Water’…Her powerful voice, slightly cryptic message, and diction helps further display the past. All three of these elements combined, helps the audience envision an older time.”

Building upon this understanding, I argue that these lyrics stage intersectionality by continuing to represent a “discourse of contradiction” to shape a self in resistance to an oppressive entertainment industry.

In contrast to the opening verse, which includes “I’m a” as a verb, the lyrics change to “I’m a” as a noun—how is doing and being tied up in making the self, specifically in the context of Black female celebrity? The lyrics signify “wave” as both action and being; the speaker is both moving through the waters and is the wave in the waters. Her elusiveness is essential to her performance of resistance; she is both the movement and what’s moving. She is a “riot” and she is going to “riot.” Again, she moves from the implicitly aggressive “wave” to the explicitly aggressive “riot” and then shifts back to performance of emotionality with “tears.” However, again, the tears can extinguish, but also “burn into flames.” After repeating the “Freedom” chorus, Kendrick Lamar sings lyrics which Cook asserts “echoes the present. He talks about the current fears of an

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African American citizen.” Knowles-Carter finds power in constructing a self that sings in artistic metaphors of rain, as well as a Black woman singer-celebrity who both navigates an historically oppressive entertainment industry, and also has the power to “reign” over the it; she does so by presenting herself as unapologetically Black regardless of audience comfortability and negative response, and, in turn, makes her experience within the entertainment industry audible and visible in a new, more explicitly political way. Yet, directly following this song, she emphasizes that she isn’t doing anything new by including “the voice of Hattie White, Jay Z’s grandmother, taken from a speech she gave at her 90th birthday party last April in Clayton, Delaware.” She says, “I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade.” “Freedom” to White is innovation and inner strength, which, as Knowles-Carter has shown throughout the visual album, is dependent upon creating a community of Black women. White is a part of Knowles-Carter’s community, including all the other Black women she’s surrounded herself with in this album. Through the interplay of sound and image that creates an interplay of the past and present, Knowles-Carter makes her experiences within the entertainment industry visible and audible.

The diversity of Black women’s responses to Knowles-Carter’s Lemonade opens understanding and conversation about the “shared angle of vision” where perceptions diverge and converge within the entertainment industry specifically for Black women singer-celebrities, and institutions that Black women generally navigate. In her book This Will Be My Undoing:

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Arguably more so than any other black star, Beyoncé is a divisive figure. A few days after Lemonade was released, bell hooks declared in an essay titled “moving Beyond Pain” that Beyoncé’s ‘construction of feminism cannot be trusted … In the world of fantasy feminism, there are no class, sex, and race hierarchies that break down simplified categories of women and men, no call to challenge and change systems of domination, no emphasis on intersectionality. In such a simplified worldview, women gaining the freedom to be like men can be seen as powerful. But it is a false construction of power.’ This was not the first time bell hooks had criticized Beyoncé. In 2014, during a New School discussion called ‘Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body,’ hooks called Beyoncé a terrorist for appearing on the cover of Time magazine in scanty attire. Hooks was hardly the only critic. Rapper Azealia Banks believed the Lemonade peddled the ‘heartbroken black female narrative’ that was the antithesis of feminism, labeling its theme ‘stupidity,’ not strength. Ashleigh Shackelford of Wear Your Voice Mag argued that Lemonade is not for fat black women or femmes because there none in the special. At the end of her essay, bell hooks concludes that Lemonade does not resolve anything, and that healthy self-love can only emerge if black women resist patriarchal romanticization of domination in relationships and refuse to be victims. Once I finished that last line, I felt like a deflated whoopee cushion. Victim? Victim? Is that what I’d just watched for a full hour, a portrait of a victim? Lemonade was the first time I had seen Beyoncé in an incredibly vulnerable state, and I know her vulnerable state, and I know her vulnerability was real because I felt it. She is not a fighter against patriarchal domination, but this does not mean that she is a victim. She is a feeling black woman, and I realized simply from the criticism of Lemonade that as a black woman, if you are not always fighting for something larger than yourself, then you are somehow the enemy, not performing the ‘correct’ form of black womanhood in contemporary America. We should not have to choose between being black, being a woman, and being human in our own story.65

Jerkins situates her own perspective within critical commentary of bell hooks, Azealia Banks, and Ashleigh Shackelford, emphasizing that the expectations to perform “the ‘correct’ form of black womanhood in contemporary America” is too great of a burden for Black women to put on each other.

Performing Artistry, Identity, and History in #BEYCHELLA

This project spotlights many of Black women singers who were the first to navigate the entertainment industries of their time: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield was the first African-American woman singer to negotiate a managerial contract in the United States; Pauline E. Hopkins was the first Black woman to write and stage a musical, as well as the first writer to respond to the disappearance of Black women sopranos from the concert stage through the representation of Dianthe Lusk in her novel *Of One Blood*; Sissieretta Jones was the first Black woman to manage her own show. These women created opportunities for success by showcasing their talent, as well as appropriating and countering audience assumptions influenced by blackface minstrelsy. Following *Lemonade*, Knowles-Carter’s Coachella performance on April 14, 2018 continues her powerful work of making experiences of Black womanhood visible and audible with the entertainment industry. When Knowles-Carter proclaimed “Thank you for letting me be the first black woman to headline Coachella. Ain’t that ‘bout a bitch?” she directly commented on the historically exclusionary entertainment industry. I argue that her Coachella performance staged intersectionality by calling attention to her past absence to emphasize the significance of her present, unapologetically Black presence. I argue that by including Black cultural signifiers, including marching band musicians and line dancers from Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well as performing the Black National Anthem “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” Beyoncé provides direct commentary on an entertainment industry that historically renders Black women’s experiences invisible and silent; arguably staging intersectionality, Knowles-Carter calls attention to the past absence of Black women singer-

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celebrities on the predominantly white music stage to emphasize the significance of her contemporary presence.

Attendees and YouTube viewers watched as a line of marching band flags lifted one by one to reveal Knowles-Carter’s Nefertiti cape. After turning around, she silently strutted down the stage to the marching bands’ music while maintaining eye contact with the camera. Marching bands and dance lines from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) took formation on the enormous stage behind her as she sang “Crazy In Love” and “Freedom.”

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She sang “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the Black National Anthem written by James Weldon Johnson and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson in 1900, while band members on stage wailed and keeled over and back in between verses; Knowles-Carter juxtaposes pain and history with glorious talent. Directly following, she performed the song “Formation,” walking back out into the crowd from where she came.

Beyoncé’s Coachella performance countered the entertainment industry’s structural domain of power through Knowles-Carter crafting a show that did not take white audiences primarily into account. She did not care whether audience members knew or understood the references to “Lift Every Voice and Sing” and Black fraternity and sorority traditions. She made the disciplinary domain of power, the impact that the oppressive and exclusive entertainment industry has, visible by proclaiming “Ain’t that ‘bout a bitch?” regarding her experience as the first Black woman to headline Coachella. She countered the cultural domain of power by drawing upon African-American artistic and musical traditions, and, she complicated the interpersonal domain of power by requiring her Coachella performance to be live-streamed on YouTube. While she performed for a predominantly affluent Coachella audience in person, she
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

democratized access to her performance by live-streaming it to a larger audience over the internet.

Just as Knowles-Carter brought together a community of many prominent Black women and girls in American culture for *Lemonade*, for her Coachella performance she expanded her community and audience to other Black women and men including her sister, singer Solange Knowles, her husband, rapper Shawn Carter, known as Jay-Z, and former Destiny’s Child singers Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams to perform with her on stage. Black fraternity brothers and sorority sisters clad in BEY-U outfits stepped, reciting lyrics to her songs. With her performance, she called attention to various institutions including the entertainment industry, the university, family, and marriage. And, she always summoned attention to her body and her voice as an unapologetically proud Black woman. Knowles-Carter’s Coachella performance both centered a Black audience that entertainment industries historically and intentionally suppressed to favor white audiences, as well as spoke back to reviewers who criticize Knowles-Carter for representing raced and gendered experiences as a Black woman in her artistry. Asserting that African-American women’s voices profoundly shape how we read and understand African-American women’s experiences, her performance on and off the stage provides new ways to read the past, and new ways to imagine celebrities who will follow her on the historical stage.68

On August 6, 2018, *Vogue* released “Beyoncé in Her Own Words: Her Life, Her Body, Her Heritage,” featuring Knowles-Carter on the cover of their coveted September issue with the

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headline “Everyone’s Voice Counts.” The *Vogue* piece, more of a rumination and proclamation than an interview, is organized in eight sections that encompass how she understands her body and voice within the entertainment industry specifically, and within the United States generally, as a Black woman: Pregnancy & Body Acceptance, Opening Doors, Ancestry, My Journey, Freedom, Coachella, OTR II, and Legacy. This piece is a cultural text that shapes how Knowles-Carter defines her own artistry as well as her legacy, her own body as well as her own voice; moreover, this piece is an argument for Knowles-Carter’s subjectivity as a Black woman, artist, entrepreneur, mother, and wife.

“Coachella” is one of the eight topics that organize Beyoncé’s *Vogue* feature. She reflects on the development of her artistry for the performance:

I had a clear vision for Coachella. I was so specific because I’d seen it, I’d heard it, and it was already written inside of me. One day I was randomly singing the black national anthem to Rumi while putting her to sleep. I started humming it to her every day. In the show at the time I was working on a version of the anthem with these dark minor chords and stomps and belts and screams. After a few days of humming the anthem, I realized I had the melody wrong. I was singing the wrong anthem. One of the most rewarding parts of the show was making that change. I swear I felt pure joy shining down on us. I know that most of the young people on the stage and in the audience did not know the history of the black national anthem before Coachella. But they understood the feeling it gave them.

It was a celebration of all the people who sacrificed more than we could ever imagine, who moved the world forward so that it could welcome a woman of color to headline such a festival.

Beyoncé describes her work as something akin to the mythology of Mozart’s artistry, who would simply write down music perfectly that was already in his mind, situating herself within a matrix

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69 Knowles-Carter chose her photographer, Tyler Mitchell, who she explains is the first African American photographer to shoot a *Vogue* cover.
of historically gifted artists and musicians. She also situates herself in the creation of her artistry as a mother, composing and imagining while singing for her child. While she first altered the Black National Anthem to sound sadder with “dark minor chords,” she realized that she could juxtapose the grandness of the song with “stomps and belts and screams” for a stronger effect that encompasses both the hope and pain the song represents. With this revision, she represented the past and present simultaneously, as well as amplified the power of controlling body and voice that challenges the entertainment industry’s expectation of showing no emotion or pain.

This project began by exploring the presence and absence of singer-celebrity Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s voice in archival texts; through her publicly addressed letters, song lyrics, and contract her voice in these cultural texts reveals some realities of being a Black woman on the concert stage in the antebellum period. However, there is no direct commentary on Greenfield’s experiences within the entertainment industry from Greenfield herself. This trend continues through my exploration of Pauline Hopkins’s representation of Dianthe Lusk in her novel Of One Blood, as well as through Sissieretta Jones’s archival legacy, which similarly does not include personal reflections on her experiences within the entertainment industry. In the twenty first century, with Knowles-Carter’s strategic self-marketing and access to social media, she can control her self-image, which has begun to include her experiences and reflections on being a Black woman in the entertainment industry.

In her Blavity article, “After the Greatness that Was Beychella, I No Longer Care About White Beyoncé Fans,” OnlyBlackGirl explains

Watching her at #Beychella, took my stannin to a whole other level. I actually cried, whilst also screaming at my laptop screen at the pure black girl joy and representation she put on stage for my people in front that raisin in the potato salad, putting ass audience. Somewhere in the middle of that performance, while we kept getting shots of those confused white people’s faces, I realized that I really do not care about nor will I be recognizing white Beyoncé stans. White Beyoncé stans have always rubbed me the
It was the wrong way, but it wasn’t until Beychella that I was able to pinpoint why. It’s because you all don’t get it. White Beyoncé stans are just stans for superficial reasons. Yes, she is an amazing artist and anyone can and honestly should be a fan, but white Beyoncé stans don’t recognize Beyoncé as a black artist.\(^{71}\)

Specifically, OnlyBlackGirl explains that “white Beyoncé stans” are

> here for cute outfits and a crisp, hard-hitting 8-count they can do at whatever open mic-talent show they sign up for once a year. Where are the white fans when Beyoncé’s blackness and womanhood are under fire? Where are the white fans fighting for Black Lives Matter? For black anything? Where were the white fans when Beyoncé was scrutinized for being perched atop that sinking police car in “Formation”?\(^{72}\)

This powerful reflection speaks back to the acknowledgement of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Sissieretta Jones; audiences had no issue calling them “The Black Swan” and “The Black Patti” because those names allowed audiences to acknowledge their blackness as something in relation to whiteness. Her description speaks powerfully to Beyoncé’s own context as a contemporary singer-celebrity, but also to Greenfield’s; only in the 1970s did historians acknowledge Greenfield’s impact on other Black singers to embrace their blackness. Jones had to create her own show so that she could perform opera songs since Black sopranos were no longer a “curiosity” that white audiences felt the need to encounter any longer. There’s another striking similarity that Beychella raises in relation to Greenfield.

> While we live in the twenty first century, saturated with live streams that can be recorded, Knowles-Carter made the decision to keep her Coachella performance elusive:

> Owing to the late hour that it took place, the impact of Beyoncé’s mind-blowing performance at Coachella Saturday night was a bit diffuse—it ended after 4 a.m. East Coast time, although YouTube re-aired the show on its livestream Sunday afternoon and viewers were able to scroll back and watch it in its entirety. But once that stream timed out, it was gone, except for brief segments of the official livestream in news reports and lots of wobbly fan-shot footage (and a few sites


\(^{72}\) OnlyBlackGirl.
Reznik, Staging Intersectionality

that illegally archived the livestream and have managed to elude Beyoncé’s web police, probably not for long). So how can anyone who missed the livestream watch it now, at least legally? Well, apparently, you can’t.73

The live-stream was taken down directly after the performance, allowing Knowles-Carter to maintain control of her voice and representation. What remained on Beyonce.com—until April 17, 2019—are photographs.74

On April 17, 2019, a year after her Coachella performance, Knowles-Carter released Homecoming on Netflix, created and directed by Knowles-Carter herself. Homecoming does the work of archiving the Coachella performances, as well as making Knowles-Carter’s prolific role in its creation visible and audible. While Greenfield’s, Hopkins’, Dianthe’s, and Jones’ archives reveal absences of the communities that they created with and within, the documentary makes the large community of performers’ roles visible and audible in the shows successfully coming to fruition, showcasing the various Black women’s roles in Knowles-Carter’s performances. I began this chapter reflecting on how opera scholar Naomi André draws a historical line from Marian Anderson to Knowles-Carter; the chapters throughout this project have imagined drawing various historical and literary lines, from Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield to Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, with representations of historical Black women celebrities including Pauline E. Hopkins and Sissieretta Jones, as well as literary representations of historical Black women celebrities including Dianthe Lusk and Sissieretta Jones. The various lines I’ve drawn will hopefully lead scholars regardless of focus to imagine the lines they’re drawing and whose

74 https://www.beyonce.com/search/beychella/
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voices and presences they’re leaving out, whether intentionally or not. Embracing the mess, the imperfections, of those lines we draw are where the true learning and allyship begins.
Conclusion

Voice is the expression of the ‘deep down inside’ that Black women learn to create as they ‘pick up’ strength. It reflects those points of view that locate Black women in their actual circumstances rather than in a timeless narration of struggle and caregiving... They also privilege experience over expectations, and refuse to allow strength to displace their humanity. They speak flexibly about what is really happening to them. And instead of fighting the expectation of strength with the silencing tactics of being strong, such women confront the discourse, not themselves, for its shortcomings. They recognize how it isolates Black women from the human family, how it covers over inequities, and how it thwarts their development and wellness. As they face their divided consciousness and question whose interests are served by strength, they firmly assert that they are inherently valuable—not because they suffer, survive, or care for others, but because they exist and are, undeniably, irreducibly, human.¹

— Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant

So I’m writing the letter to the industry
It says ‘Fuck you, signed sincerely’

— Solange Piaget Knowles²

The “treasured nuggets from a store of common knowledge”³ that Georgia A. Ryder identified in 1975 specifically referred to the racist and sexist conclusions of Columbia University’s Cantometrics project; she challenged these findings with evidence of Black women’s performances. This project specifically engages with the archival remains of Black women singers’ representations by combining their voices and perspectives, both historical and fictional. In so doing, this project challenges existing notions about Black women singers within popular culture and the white audiences’ imaginations. By foregrounding cultural texts by and

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² “Fuck the Industry” (2010).
³ “Black Women in Song: Some Socio-Cultural Images,” a paper read at the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History meeting in Atlanta (October 1975, 601).
Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

about African-American women singers, writers, and critics illuminates the various kinds of resistance they could enact.

I’d like to conclude by continuing to expand the frame of African-American women singers and consider who isn’t included in this project’s four chapters. We could consider lyrics from Cardi B’s 2018 album *Invasion of Privacy* to analyze how she claims her subjectivity as a former stripper and skyrocketing rapper-celebrity in the entertainment industry. We could analyze how singer and rapper Lizzo’s lyrics shape her subjectivity within an entertainment industry that privileges light-skin and thin bodies. These Black women singers navigate domains of power illuminate how they both engage with, embrace, and reject the entertainment industry’s racist, sexist, and classist standards. These singers have always been already theorizing their experience as Black women, and can provide insights to read backwards in time to the texts this dissertation explores. However, to conclude, I will consider the lyrics of Solange Knowles, (Beyoncé Knowles-Carter’s sister) an artist in her own right, who shapes her subjectivity as an unapologetically Black woman.

While Beyoncé wields agency to shape the entertainment industry, and arguably is the entertainment industry in the twenty first century, her sister Solange shapes her subjectivity both through lyrics that flat out rejecting the industry, and she creates her artistry within the industry. Solange has continued to challenge the entertainment industry’s structural domain of power which privileges white audiences; she challenges this domain of power by representing interactions between individuals to show how the system works, and, perhaps, how Black artists can counter it by sharing their experiences. In her 2016 album *A Seat at the Table*: During the interlude “For Us by Us,” Master P, legendary southern rapper, explains,

> [a]nd they offered me a million dollar deal, and had the check ready. Said I wouldn’t be able to use my name. I was fighting my brother, because “Man, you
shoulda took the million dollars!” I said “No, what you think I’m worth? If this white man offer me a million dollars I gotta be worth forty or fifty…Or ten or something.” To being able to make “Forbes” and come from the Projects. You know, “Top 40 Under 40.” Which they said couldn’t be done. Had twenty records on the top “Billboard” at one time. For an independent company. Black-owned company. You know, going to the white lady’s house where my Grandmother lived at, and say, “Look, you don’t have to work here no more Big Mama! We got more money than the people on St. Charles Street.” And I, I took that anger and said, “I’mma put it into my music.” I tell people all the time, “If you don’t understand my record, you don’t understand me, so this is not for you.”

This interlude represents the entertainment industry’s structural domain of power by showing how an individual Black artist was vulnerable to be exploited by a white entertainment industry. Master P explains how the entertainment industry was going to pay him, but he “wouldn’t be able to use [his] name.” This specific aspect of Master P’s story, that he could sell his art, but he’d also have to sell his name, illuminates our understanding of “My Name Is Sissieretta Jones;” Master P had the agency to not take the industry money and invest in his own artistry. Moreover, he represents the interpersonal domain of power in which he was able to speak back to the entertainment industry and reject it; however, at the same time, he also articulates the pressures he experiences of caring for his family. Ultimately, Master P echoes what Solange articulated in “Fuck the Industry,” and she draws upon his story to propel into the next song on her album.

Solange continues to establish an interpersonal domain of power in which an African-American woman responds to the experience of an African-American man; in shaping this call-and-response, she unapologetically does not take the entertainment industry or white audiences into account. She says “fuck you” to the entertainment industry’s domains of power, and shapes

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Reznik, *Staging Intersectionality*

her own in the song “F.U.B.U” featuring The Chicago Kid and The-Dream which follows the interlude featuring Master P. Solange proclaims:

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All my niggas in the whole wide world
Made this song to make it all y’all’s turn
For us, this shit is for us
All my niggas let the whole world know
Play this song and sing it on your terms
For us, this shit is for us
Don’t try to come for us
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Through this song, Solange defines the terms and whose “turn” it is to sing. She foregrounds Black voices and experiences, unmediated by white audiences and opinions. To “[p]lay this song and sing it on your terms” means to reject the entertainment industry’s oppressive domains of power which render Black artists fragmented in the face of adhering to racist, sexist, and classist industry standards. Moreover, Solange makes the significance of this song, and the unapologetic proclamation of individual Blackness, apparent, by highlighting the collective lived experiences within institutions. For example, Solange highlights the racism that African-Americans face in a space like the airport:

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When a nigga tryna board the plane
And they ask you, “What’s your name again?”
Cause they thinking, “Yeah, you’re all the same”
Oh, it’s for us
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The structural domains of power in the entertainment industry, as well as other institutions in the United States from the nineteenth century on, work to deny African-Americans individuality, and Solange calls that out here. This song, in rejecting the entertainment industry’s oppressive domains of power, creates a space where people can share and air their experiences to create

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5 https://genius.com/Solange-fubu-lyrics
change. Change comes from foregrounding perspectives that have been erased, in embracing difference and collectivity, and being aware of the politics of your body and voice.

Specifically, Solange rejects the structural domain of power that the entertainment industry perpetuates, and, that she points out, is used by other Black women performers. Most obviously, she proclaims in her 2010 single “Fuck the Industry”:

I’ll never be picture perfect Beyoncé  
Fly like J-Lo or singing Baby like ‘Shanti  
I barely comb my hair, yeah, that’s on a good day  
I don’t care what the hood say  
I ain’t street like Keyshia, ain’t never tried to be  
And I got soul in my soul but not quite like Mary  
Ain’t nothing really R&B about me…  
And I got knowledge if you really want to talk about it  
No, I don’t trust the crowd just to walk around it  
So I’m writing the letter to the industry  
It says “Fuck you, signed sincerely.”

Solange articulates the industry’s and audiences’ structural comparison of her to other women artists of color including her sister (Beyoncé), Jennifer Lopez (J-Lo), Ashanti (‘Shanti), Keyshia Myeshia Cole (Keyshia), and Mary J. Blige (Mary). In defining herself in contrast to her other Black women singer-celebrities, Solange highlights the diverse representations that comprise the entertainment industry, and calls for even more diversity in representations of African-American women singers. Although the structural domain of power seeks to deny Black women their individuality, Solange articulates her own, and the other women’s individualities. Making the effect that this comparison has on her visible, to illuminate the disciplinary domain of power, she proclaims that she’s “writing a letter to the industry,” and that she no longer allows the industry to dictate her understanding of herself as an artist. Although Solange proclaims, “fuck you,” she

still uses the medium of a song to relay her message, and therefore still exists within the entertainment industry. She’s relaying this critique to make change, and to highlight the power that African-American women can wield by using and navigating the entertainment industry.

Later in the song, Solange shapes an interpersonal domain of power in which she speaks back to the entertainment industry and audiences in general, yet frames it as an interaction with another person. She proclaims, “I’m not apologetic, if you don’t like it, it’s probably ‘cause you don’t get it.” She explains how if you don’t like her craft, “it’s not for you.” Rejecting the entertainment industry’s standard of appealing to white audiences, Solange shapes her subjectivity by unapologetically saying what her art is (a combination of her talent, identity, and history) and who it is for (Black audiences).

Through the song lyrics, Solange writes a letter, which is interesting considering this project because it reminds us how Greenfield wrote letters to her audiences. Solange’s song raises questions that we can turn back in time to read Greenfield’s archival documents with: how did Greenfield challenge the oppression of the entertainment industry through writing letters? How did her letters, perhaps, create change that hasn’t been documented or directly attributed to her? As a white woman scholar, how can I continue to imagine re-animations of performances within systems of sexism, racism, and classism to resist oppression? Listening to learn, rather than ascribe assumptions intentionally or unintentionally, is essential work scholarly work, as well as fostering allyship, history making, and world-making.
Coda

*I’m asking us to sit with the Beyoncé conundrum that exists for all of us. At least she had the courage to own the messiness of it.*

–Brittany Cooper

*Confronting the ‘mess’ of people’s everyday practice is a necessary first step towards more effectively connecting people to the resources they want and need.*

–Donna M. Lanclos

Beyoncé poses a fruitful conundrum for feminist and anti-racist audiences; are her performances of femininity and masculinity feminist? Are her hair choices anti-black? Reading these artistic choices through a lens that considers both/and is a more fruitful, rigorous way for us to consume contemporary performances, as well as look back on archives and creatives resistance strategies. Greenfield was both performing within and outside of stereotypes of Black femininity, and, those strategic choices were a part of her artistic mastery. Solange proclaims “fuck the industry” on a single that circulated through that very industry. Other white women performers, too, enact these conundrums of feminism/sexism, classism/equity, and racism/anti-racism.

This project documents the “mess” of bringing an intersectional focus to cultural texts that represent invisible and silenced African-American women’s voices. By emphasizing the “mess” of my own analytical practices to show and reflect on the racism and sexism inherent in nineteenth-century archives about African-American women which inevitably impacts contemporary scholarship, I encourage contemporary scholars who are privileged based on their

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race, gender, and/or class to reflect on how their subject position impacts how they approach and narrate cultural texts, whose voices get to endure, and how. My dissertation remains open and changing—as the release of Knowles-Carter’s Netflix film *Homecoming* in April 2019 affirms; as we access more African-American women’s voices from the past, present, and future, we will be able to more clearly theorize the complexity of Black women celebrities’ experiences.
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